

International Sociological Association
e-bulletin



Number 6, March 2007

Contents

From the editor	2
Announcement	3
Call for Submissions	4

Featured Essays

Rubbing Along? The 'English' Drift into North West Wales <i>Angela Drakakis-Smith, Graham Day and Howard Davis</i>	8
The Perils and Pitfall of Performance Ethnography <i>Douglas Farrer</i>	17

In Conversation with Prof. Wang Gung Wu

Interview by Vineeta Sinha	27
The Age of New Paradigms <i>Wang Gungwu</i>	39

Reflections on "Teaching Sociology"

Teaching Visual Ethnography in Singapore: The Potentials of Digital Video for Research in the Social Sciences <i>Roxana Waterson</i>	48
Fieldwork and Teaching Contemporary Sociology: Some Experiences from Uganda <i>Peter Rwagara Atekyereza</i>	58

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

From the Editor

I am very pleased to bring to members of the International Sociological Association, the sixth issue of the E-Bulletin which was launched in July 2005. In these six issues I have tried to introduce a structure and format and adhere to it. I continue to feature in this Bulletin, featured essays, an interview segment and reflective pieces of particular substantive and theoretical issues. This issue of the E-Bulletin includes three essays in the first section by Angela Drakakis-Smith, Graham Day and Howard Davis and Stephen Douglas Farrer. The interview segment features a conversation with Wang Gungwu as well the text of a paper by him, while the reflections section carries two experiences of teaching sociology in very different settings - by Roxana Waterson and Peter Rwagara Atekyereza.

In an effort to revisit and disseminate the logic and agenda of the E-Bulletin, I include in this issue the original announcement and call for submissions in a number of different categories. By way of information, I also share with ISA members and readers of the E-Bulletin the table of contents of two recent issues of the E-Bulletin. I am committed to improving the E-Bulletin and as always am open to suggestions and feedback about this publication. My role as editor is to truly globalise and internationalise the E-Bulletin and to infuse the kind of diversity that would be reflective of the global community of sociologists. I, therefore, invite and welcome submissions to the E-Bulletin.

Vineeta Sinha

Department of Sociology

National University of Singapore

e-mail: ebulletineditor@yahoo.com

e-mail: socvs@nus.edu.sg

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

Announcement

E-Bulletin (International Sociological Association)

The initiation and formulation of a new concept for an ISA publication, in the form of the E-Bulletin, indeed signals an exciting time for the social sciences. This document is by definition multi-dimensional and multi-functional. As an organ of the ISA, it aims to cater to the various needs of the organisation as well as its diverse community of members, located in varied socio-cultural settings. It is conceptualised as a forum through which the various ISA members are able engage in debates and communication regarding the intellectual activities of national associations and research committees of the ISA.

This publication carries an important and central intellectual agenda. As editor, I see this as a forum for showcasing the work, practices, ideas and voices of the diverse community of sociologists, engaged in substantive, ethnographic, demographic, theoretical, historical and critical research, and operating out of different locations, both sociological and geographic. The publication has the potential to stimulate and facilitate scholarly and professional communication and interaction amongst individual sociologists, universities, research institutions and non-governmental organisations - local, regional and international- connecting in important ways a widely scattered community. In my view, developing a substantive and theoretical focus upon which the structure of the Bulletin must then rest is an important initial task - in identifying central issues, themes, dilemmas, problematics and challenges that concern sociologists everywhere. As a practitioner myself, I have my own sense of the important issues, but I seek and solicit ideas and suggestions from other sociologists. Given that the global community of sociologists is multi-faceted and diverse, the bulletin too strives to reflect and convey this multiplicity.

The plan is for every issue to include a very brief editorial and carry at least two pieces of substantive or theoretical interest (short essays, addresses, reflections) by sociologists from different parts of the world. An essay by a prominent sociologist could be accompanied by commentaries and responses from other practitioners. The Bulletin could also be a space for important conversations with eminent, practising sociologists, presented in the form of in depth interviews or it might carry important review essays on particular subfields of sociology. There is also a plan for a forum- for exchange of letters and communication. It could further showcase important contributions to the sociological enterprise from practitioners working outside of academia - such as NGOs, and those in applied fields. I think that a fluid shape to the publication would allow these kinds of contributions to be presented to members of the ISA. The technical and publication schedule details are still being formalised but I expect the first issue of the E-Bulletin to be published in the next few months.

Personally I am very excited for this opportunity to contribute to developing the intellectual dimension of the new electronic publication, but seek the co-operation and involvement of all sociologists to launch this successfully.

Vineeta Sinha, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

Call for Submissions

E-Bulletin

Published three times a year in March, July and November.

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Production : SAGE, London

All submissions to the E-Bulletin must have sociological value and interest for an international community of social scientists, both from the point of pure, scholarly research as well as from applied dimensions. We welcome submissions from teaching faculty, postdoctoral fellows and graduate students in the social sciences. We welcome all submissions in the following categories:

1) Essays (up to 4000 words)

We invite contributions in the form of feature articles from sociologists working in all fields - substantive, methodological and theoretical. The article can be both empirical and theoretical and deal with issues that will be of interest to sociologists practising in a variety of locales- universities, research institutes and NGOs- for example.

2) In conversation with...

Here our intention is to showcase the sociological work and life experiences of a prominent sociologist (including 'retired') from any part of the world, in the form of a dialogue, conversation, interview with another sociologist. All suggestions and proposals are welcome.

3) Reflections (up to 3000 words)

We are seeking the more personal, biographical accounts from practising sociologists about their experiences of teaching, researching or leading administratively in a particular setting. The topic and theme is open-ended and we welcome all proposals.

4) Photo essays

We welcome photo essays from practitioners in the field of visual sociology on any substantive topic. The available technology facilitates inclusion of visual material, with text-based substance.

5) Video clips

Given this new medium of publication, we will be able to upload and make available video clips to ISA members. We thus invite submissions of videos, short feature films and recordings - as sociological 'products' in addition to a written text.

6) Forum (200-400 words)

We invite brief comments, notes, communications and letters from sociologists on any topic of relevance to an international community of sociologists. We intend for the

'Forum' section to be a regular feature in the e-Bulletin. This will need the support of the members to be successful.

All communications should include a contact name and address, including an e-mail address. The deadline for submissions is the first of the month before each of the three issues (eg. 1 December for the January issue).

7) Reaching out to the Community (up to 3000 words)

This section is crucial and serves to address and highlight the very important work done by sociologists outside academic arenas – universities and research institutes – such as NGOs and other groups working for the betterment of individuals and communities in various societal domains.

Please direct all communications, submissions and enquires to:

A/P Vineeta Sinha, Editor

Department of Sociology

National University of Singapore

11 Arts Link, Singapore 115750

e-mail: ebulletineditor@yahoo.com

phone: 0065-68745976; fax: 0065-67779579

Number 4, July 2006

Contents

Editorial 2

Featured Essays

Communitarian Politics of the East

Chua Beng Huat 3

The Tamil Movement for Eelam

Michael Roberts 12

In Conversation with Prof. Syed Hussein Alatas

Interviewed by *Patrick Pillai* 25

Reflections on “Publishing and Academia”

Writing, Politics and Business in the Academe: A View From Afar

Yeoh Seng-Guan 32

New Media and Representations of the Intellectual in the Network Society

Daniel Gob 36

Survivor Academia – Your Next Challenge is Publishing!

Julia Rozanova 43

The Journal Impact Factor and Citation Rankings in Sociology: Nonsense or Necessity?

Melinda Mills 46

Number 5, November 2006

Contents

Editorial 2

Featured Essays

Escalating Accountability in the “Impossible Science”: Perils and Pitfalls

Susan McDaniel 3

Colonial Modernity, the Sociological Study of Religion, and Nineteenth Century Majoritarianism

Sujata Patel 14

Global Aspects of Professionalism : from defining traits to discourse of organizational control

Julia Evetts 26

In Conversation with Ms. Ela Gandhi

Interviewed by Vineeta Sinha 38

Reflections on “Fieldwork and Ethnography”

Constructing a 'Normal Identity Space' While Doing Field Work with the Bnei Sakhnin Soccer Team

Anipal Kotter 52

Sex in the Field: Anthropologists' Sexual Involvement with the People in the Field

Satoshi Ota 57

Headnotes, Heartnotes and Persuasive Ethnography of Thai Migrant Workers in Singapore

Pattana Kittiarsa 63

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

Rubbing Along? The 'English' Drift into North West Wales.

Angela Drakakis-Smith
University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies
angela.drakakis-smith1@virgin.net

Graham Day
University of Wales
g.a.s.day@bangor.ac.uk

Howard Davis
University of Wales
H.h.davis@bangor.ac.uk

Dr Angela Drakakis-Smith was awarded an ESRC scholarship to undertake her Ph.D. which was obtained from the University of Bristol in 2003 for work on policy, practice and service delivery to Gypsies and Travellers in Staffordshire. In the last year she has worked as researcher on a University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies investigation of migration into north-west Wales. Her interests are in the mechanics of race/ethnicity/diversity/equality and the way in which these are played out via national policies which are translated and implemented (or not) at the local level and how such interactions affect identity. She is the author of 'Off the Record: A People's History of Keele'.

Graham Day is Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Social Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor, with interests in rural and community sociology, national identity, and Wales. He is the author of 'Making Sense of Wales' (2002), 'Theorizing Nationalism' (2004) and 'Community and Everyday Life' (2006).

Howard Davis is Professor of Social Theory and Institutions in the School of Social Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor. He is interested in theories of culture and identity in a range of national contexts. His current projects and publications focus mainly on the media, ethnicity and culture in post-Soviet Russia.

We hereby confirm that the article entitled *Rubbing Along? The 'English' Drift into North West Wales* submitted for publication has not been published before, and it is not under consideration for publication in any other journals.

Abstract

In-migration of non-Welsh people, and more specifically, 'the English' into North West Wales, is often perceived as a problem, although very little is known about the English in Wales. Change is often perceived as detrimental and a threat rather than an opportunity and something different. Whilst attempts have been made to preserve the Welsh language, it is a minority language in Wales, although not necessarily in North West Wales. Thus influxes of non-Welsh speakers can cause unease and resentment in some

small Welsh-speaking communities. 'Incomers' can form a linguistic minority in the communities where they settle, upsetting the cultural and linguistic balance.

This research sought to examine broadly via a questionnaire survey of 260 across nine communities and in three geographical areas, and then more closely via a qualitative study of 50 from those areas and communities, who 'the English' in north west Wales were as 'a grouping', how they perceived themselves as a minority in their Welsh majority milieu and how far perceptions and stereotypes attached to the grouping were accurate.

Keywords

in-out migration, culture shock, minority/majority, colonial memory, habitus, Welsh-English relationship, Welsh language, language supremacy

Context for the Research

Issues of ethnic diversity and cultural integration have been brought to the forefront of contemporary social and political debate in Britain. Most often they reflect the repercussions of past and present movements across 'national' U.K. boundaries, but there are also effects of internal movements between the nations of Britain, namely England, Scotland and Wales. Recent processes of devolution, which have transferred certain powers from the Westminster government to a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, have contributed to a heightened sensitivity surrounding different versions of Britishness, and competing national and regional identities. Groups that can be seen as 'out of place' play a significant role in this. There is for example a growing body of work scrutinising English people who reside in Scotland, and their relations with the local population (Jedrej and Nuttal 1996; Watson 2003; McIntosh et al. 2004). In Wales, there is new interest in understanding the position of ethnic minorities (Williams et al. 2006; O'Leary 2000; 2004). According to the 2001 Census, those born in England constitute by far the largest of such a group, providing very nearly a quarter of the Welsh population.

The consequences of English migration into Wales have provided a long standing theme for sociological research, much of it focussing on the condition of the Welsh language and the continuing crisis of the rural economy, and dealing primarily with the relationship between incomers, the Welsh-speaking populations and communities in the throes of change (Borland et al. 1992; Fevre and Thompson 1999; Philips and Thomas 2001; Williams and Morris 2000). Initial interest in the significance of English second-home ownership in Welsh rural communities (Bielkus et al. 1972; Bollom 1978) has given way to the concern with more permanent forms of settlement, including retirement migration and the urban-rural shift (Day 1989; Aitchison et al. 1989; Jones 1993; Cloke et al. 1997). As British people more generally have tended to relocate from the cities and towns to the more rural areas, so the Welsh countryside has experienced considerable inward migration, counteracting earlier processes of rural depopulation. At the same time, there is continuing concern about the outward movement of younger people seeking wider opportunities in the urban and metropolitan centres (Jones et al. 2001).

The tendency has been to regard both forms of migration as a problem, disrupting the stability of an indigenous population. The gaze has been 'Welsh', and focussed upon the English as outsiders. Studies have tended to portray a scenario of nostalgia (*'hiraeth'*) for a passing 'golden age' of community and a lost parochial idyll. Particular concern has been felt regarding the implications for the Welsh language. After a prolonged period of decline, steps have been taken to stabilise the proportion of the population who speak Welsh, currently around twenty per cent, and to safeguard the future of Welsh-speaking communities. Wales is now officially recognised as a bilingual territory, within which

Welsh enjoys equal status with English. Even so, the future of the language remains precarious, especially given the linguistic fragmentation that has occurred in those parts of Wales which previously provided the Welsh 'heartland', *Y Fro Gymraeg* (Aitchison and Carter 2000). The settlement within it of large numbers of additional people who do not speak Welsh, and whose allegiances lie with a different, English, ethnic identification, presents a clear threat to these achievements. Consequently there has been a great deal of agitation about, and organized opposition to, continued English immigration.

In the main, research has concentrated on examining the possible deleterious effects of migration, such as negative impacts on local housing markets, job opportunities, and language use. Relatively little work has been done on the attitudes and perceptions of the incomers themselves. There is a particular short-fall in knowledge about how they select their preferred locations, what conditions they expect to meet there, and how they view the process of integration into local society. North Wales especially has been a relatively neglected area for investigation, although it contains some of the places where the Welsh language remains strongest. It is a complex region with significant, and increasing, internal variations, including differences in the proportions who speak Welsh. In some local communities, between 60 and 80 per cent of residents use Welsh as their first language. Yet although 'the English' may form a minority in such places, everyone can speak English. Our interest was in gaining a better understanding of how in-migrants perceived and responded to their situation.

Methodology

Three areas were chosen in which to locate the study, primarily for their difference and spread across north west Wales. These were distributed within two counties – Conwy and Gwynedd - to afford a county as well as an area comparison. The areas selected were the Upper Conwy Valley, the more central slate quarrying area of Gwynedd and the westerly holiday settlements of Llyn. Within these areas, nine communities were chosen (see Map 1). For ease of reference and identification these were termed the Upper Conwy Valley Villages, the Slate Villages, and the Holiday Villages.

- *The Upper Conwy Valley* Rowen
Tyn y Groes/Tal y Bont/Llanbedr y
Cennin
Dolgarrog.

- *The Slate Villages* Rachub
Bethesda
Deiniolen

- *The Holiday Villages* Criccieth
Nefyn
Abersoch



To gather the required information the project was divided into three parts, using three methodologies: a documentation study, a quantitative study and a qualitative study.

The documentation study took the form of examining relevant reports, policy documents, Local and Structure Plans at the local and national level. This stage of the study also included in-depth interviewing of policy makers: Council Leaders, Assembly Members, Members of Parliament, Community Councillors, Head Teachers, Newspaper Editors, National Park Planning and Policy Officers, officials of the Welsh Development Agency. This gave a base-line against which the rest of the interviews could be validated. The documentation study was augmented by a study of local newspapers (approximately 1300) over a 5 year period (2000 – 2005) which gave a longitudinal perspective on the reporting of relevant issues.

The quantitative study took the form of a profiling questionnaire to give base-line information with regard to the socio-economic position of incomers – who they were, what they did, why they had come, and so on. A cohort of 260 incomers was selected (by name) from the electoral register and telephone directory for telephone interviews. The questionnaire was standardised and attempted to cover a breadth of experience. The resulting information was analysed and tabulated using the SPSS package. Those who agreed to be interviewed at this stage were asked if they would be prepared to proceed to a second stage, in-depth interview. Of the 260 respondents, 180 (70 per cent) said they would do so. From this pool, 50 were selected for in-depth interviewing. Tables 1 and 2 give a breakdown for these two cohorts.

Table 1: A breakdown of the profiling questionnaire sample (260) by age

	Upper Conwy Valley	Gwynedd Slate	Gwynedd Holiday	Total
Under 30	-	2	1	3
30-39	5	14	7	26
40-49	10	11	12	33
50-59	17	17	25	59
60-69	22	16	31	69
70+	24	6	40	70
Total	78	66	116	260

Table 2: Breakdown of the In-depth Sample by Community Area

Slate Villages	15
Upper Conwy Valley Villages	15
Holiday Villages	20
Total	50

The qualitative study took the form of tape-recorded interviews lasting between 1 – 2.5 hours. The questions were as open-ended as possible. The interview scheme was divided into three parts to allow respondents to cover, as fully as possible, their experience of settling in Wales. There were sections on the moving experience, experience of community life; and experiences of civic life. Tapes were transcribed for analysis.

Findings

Overall, the areas chosen emerged as having three distinct ‘personalities’. Incomers had selected their community according to their financial abilities/constraints and to a lesser extent as places in which they were able to feel ‘comfortable’. Although a majority had visited Wales before, or knew it well, some had made very little preparation for their new life. For many, the move to Wales had been considered in the same light as moving to any other parts of the UK. Migrants had tended to view Wales, in the main, as an adjunct to England, simply another region of the UK. Some were unaware that parts of Wales had a separate working language and a distinctive culture. Despite this, it was found in general that community relations between English and Welsh residents appeared amicable. A majority said that the communities in which they lived were friendly, although some felt an undertow of anti-English feeling, with a few respondents meeting open hostility. Where communities were predominantly affluent, English incomers appeared happier and more at ease.

The ‘English’ in north west Wales were far from a homogeneous group. They had come from all regions of England, and some from the other constituent countries of the UK. Some who might be regarded locally as ‘English’, meaning ‘non-Welsh’, had come from different parts of Europe, and the world, making some villages and towns cosmopolitan. Activist groups tended to employ the term ‘English’ to refer to all incomers, and to demand ‘English Out’.

The profiling questionnaire produced a skeleton of 'the English' incomer into north west Wales which acted as an armature to be fleshed out and coloured by the in-depth interviews. Both methodologies showed incomers to be more or less fitting to their stereotypes. Many respondents claimed close Welsh relatives, connections, or ancestry. Some were Welsh returners who had acquired English partners, or who had inherited homes from Welsh relatives. Others had been visiting Wales over a long period of time and felt an affinity to the area (before relocating 78% had visited). They were more committed to Wales and more 'Welsh' in their perceptions than activist rhetoric might suggest. A third said that they had family reasons for coming to Wales. Many had lived in Wales for as long as those who would like to see them elsewhere: 42 per cent for more than 20 years. A majority said that they were happy to blend in and be part of their community, and were privileged to be 'accepted'. However, given the length of time that they had lived in Wales, and the encouragement of Welsh language learning schemes and campaigns, more than half (51.2%) had not learned Welsh. Although the remaining 48.8% said they had learned some Welsh, a later question revealed that fewer than 7 per cent could claim to use Welsh 'all the time'.

The profiling questionnaire revealed that young children, and grandchildren brought up in the area, who went to local schools, were said to be fluent Welsh-speakers, or en route to fluency. Head teachers interviewed were of the view that the policy of teaching Welsh from a very early stage in schools was proving to be a linguistic success which had begun to reverse the decline of Welsh as a community language. The fact, too, that Welsh is now a protected minority language, means that the impacts of any policy upon it, particularly with regard to housing and development, must be a consideration in local and structure planning for north west Wales.

True to expectations, a substantial proportion of our respondents were retired, but remained both socially and economically active. Among those who said that they had faced problems finding work locally (26.6%), more than half said the difficulty was not being able to speak Welsh. Incomers were less wealthy than is often supposed: just over half said that their household income was at or below average levels of £14-17,000 per annum. While 28.8% held degrees and 23.5% had professional qualifications, 14.6% had no educational qualifications. When educational attainment was matched with jobs it was found that some respondents had 'over-achieved', in that they had few or no qualifications and yet had become company directors, or senior managers. Conversely, others had 'under-achieved', having higher degrees but were working as gardeners, shop-keepers or running tea rooms. The in-depth interviews showed that the over-achievers tended to be part of the business community, and had come to Wales to pursue business opportunities, whilst the under-achievers had come to Wales to 'downsize' socially, or to achieve an improved work-life balance.

The majority of respondents appeared aware of some of the major problems facing north west Wales, and their views were empathetic with mainstream Welsh opinion on such topics as employment, migration, housing/second homes, and devolution. This was supported by evidence from the in-depth interviews, the profiling questionnaire, and letters printed in local newspapers. However, the respondents tended not to view themselves as part of any such 'problems'. In the main they were sympathetic to and supportive of Welsh culture and the Welsh language, although not necessarily in a practical way. The profiling questionnaire revealed that there were some who could speak Welsh, but who would not use it on principle. This attitude was linked to the perceived anti-English feeling in their communities, and in the area generally. This tended to work across the efforts of activist groups such as *Cymuned* and *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* (the Welsh Language Society) to increase the numbers using Welsh, indicating that the efforts of activists were, at times, perhaps counter-productive, even ill-judged.

In terms of self-identification, 26.5% of our sample pronounced themselves to be English, with 45.4% claiming their national identity to be 'British'. 7.7% said they were Welsh, 6.2% European, 1.9% English/Welsh. Some respondents gave the impression that the terms 'British' or 'European' were used rather than 'English' because these were less contentious labels and 'safer', particularly in areas where anti-English feeling was perceived to be strong. Others gave the impression that their national identity was not 'an issue' and therefore could be changed into something which reflected their circumstances more and also their new geographical position in Wales (see Day et al 2006). For some, the hybridization of identity had occurred elsewhere whilst for others the process began after moving to Wales. Some respondents felt that their Englishness was emphasized, not necessarily by themselves, but by others, who would not let them forget that they were English (and therefore not Welsh). In these instances, through a process of stimulus and response, some interviewees had internalized and reaffirmed their Englishness/otherness and thus their difference within their particular community. For this minority, Englishness assumed the status of a 'badge' of difference, a declaration of wishing to remain separate, even aloof from the mainstream Welsh community. Without constant reminders, 'nationality' might have been less of an issue for them.

Overall, respondents claimed that their experience of living in Wales was positive, and they appeared upbeat about their lives and the prospect of remaining in Wales for 'the duration'. The majority felt that they had made the right choice in moving to Wales. They also described the community in which they lived as friendly (59.1%) or fairly friendly (35.1%). However, more than half (55.9%) took no part in community activities. Some declared that they were holding back, or being held back, because they were not fully Welsh citizens but more Welsh 'belongers'. This notion of denizen rather than full citizen became more obvious in the civic domain. A small minority served on public Boards and Local Authority committees, but few were involved as representatives in local Community Councils or as elected members within local government. Some had come to Wales with the idea of not getting involved, having done this elsewhere. However, there was a general feeling among those who might have liked to participate politically, that this sphere was a 'closed shop' to them, because they did not speak Welsh, or because these were Welsh affairs. The profiling questionnaire revealed that 88.7% belonged to no political party; only 40% believed that their interests were being served by their political representatives.

Discussion

The overall impression given by the results and analysis was that respondents were in the process of adaptation to the first generation 'immigrant experience'. The English, accustomed to being part of a national majority, were finding themselves to be a 'minority' in some communities in north west Wales, and thereby having to cope with the same linguistic difficulties and other indignities faced by other migrants into UK generally, and into England in particular. Indeed, some respondents ventured the view that other minorities were now treated far better than they, 'the English', were. The situation was compounded by the fact that although English was the majority language overall, in some north west Wales communities, Welsh was the dominant and first language spoken. In asserting that Welsh ultimately should be the language of Wales, in the same way as English is the language of England, the activities of Welsh language pressure groups have provided a lively counterpoint to the views of dedicated English speakers in the struggle for language hegemony in north west Wales. Whilst some felt that bilingualism offered a way forward, an attitude could be detected whereby some believed that bilingualism was a real option only for the Welsh, and that incomers had no need to learn Welsh in addition to the English which they already spoke. Such views

tended to be linked to a past 'colonial' attitude, outmoded now by the process of devolution, and the more recent shift of power between the Welsh and the English.

The issue of linguistic superiority/inferiority in Wales is bound to the historical relationship of dominance and subjugation of the Welsh by the English. There are those among both parties who preserve long memories and antipathetical baggage, which is passed on to the next generation in a tug-of-war focussed on language, and upon the supremacy of particular cultural ways of doing things. This has produced two crystallised minority groups of anti-English and anti-Welsh individuals, who frequently identify themselves as 'the Welsh' and 'the English', and who appear to wish to perpetuate old battles *ad infinitum*, via public meetings and the letter pages of local newspapers. The emergence of groups like *Cymuned* ('Community'), who blame 'the English' for the plight of the language, and (through excessive house prices) for the out-migration of young Welsh people, and who can be represented in the local press as advocating an ethnically cleansed north west Wales, has increased the stakes in this conflictual relationship between two minority groups. Such militancy keeps issues like language and culture on the political agenda, and in the public eye, but can be counter-productive at times. For example, the Welsh spouses of some of our respondents said that they had become alienated from their Welshness, as a result of what they described as 'anti-English activity'.

Our study pointed to a potential trajectory whereby tight national, cultural, and ethnic groups with strong identities forged by the processes of habitus, make differences more difficult to accommodate, giving rise to centre and periphery groupings, insider/outsider relations, and notions of 'otherness' expressed in terms of competition, power hierarchies and ideas of superiority and inferiority. Such interactions assume a hue of 'nationalism'. Two crystallised groups rubbing acrimoniously against each other can produce sparks which lead to fanaticism, moving the interaction to another and more dangerous plane. However, whilst aware of these conflicts, the majority of our respondents appeared to desire to co-exist amicably and peacefully with their Welsh neighbours. With the steps already made towards devolution, via the National Assembly for Wales, an opportunity for the Welsh to shake off the cloak of victim and assume the mantle of governance presents itself. It is fitting that the Welsh should govern Wales as they see fit, and the mechanisms for this to happen are gradually being put into place. In this process it is important to ensure that this new role does not transgress the boundary, to promote new versions of the relationship between perpetrator and victim. It remains for people to work together to ensure that Wales emerges as a just and equitable society, capable of acknowledging the contributions made by all who live in Wales. It appears that the National Assembly has begun such a process, so that hopefully the mistakes of the past, which took the form of fragmentation, unification via force, and colonisation of parts of Wales under the sway of a single language, can be avoided.

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e-bulletin

The Perils and Pitfalls of Performance Ethnography

Douglas Farrer
National University of Singapore
socfds@nus.edu.sg

Douglas Farrer completed his doctorate in Social Anthropology in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore in 2006. His supervisor is Associate Professor Roxana Waterson and his PhD focuses on silat and Malay mysticism. He has been practicing martial arts since 1975 and is a qualified instructor in silat and kung fu. He took up silat in 1996 and has been living in Southeast Asia (Singapore and Malaysia) since 1998.

Abstract

This article discusses the performance ethnography of the Malay martial art (*silat*). Performance ethnography is considered as a research method outlined in relation to recent theoretical advances. It is advanced that performance ethnography needs to take into account embodied practice as an active constituent in the construction of identity and meaning as opposed to earlier definitions which prioritized dialogical consultation, text and representation. Depending on research design, performance ethnography is shown to operate well in conjunction with traditional and modern ethnographic methods. Performance ethnography is demarked from practitioner ethnography because performance ethnography links to the perspective of performance theory where ritual and performance are considered as heightened cultural moments, whereas practitioner ethnography probably works best as an analytical or descriptive device to document day-to-day life.

Key words

Malay martial arts, performance ethnography, reflexive exegesis, *silat*.

There is no precise agreement in the literature regarding the exact meaning of “performance ethnography.” Recently an emphasis has been placed upon *performance*, where performance ethnography is considered as a theoretical component of “critical ethnography” (Madison 2005 149-180). Unfortunately this approach adds little to a discussion of ethnographic methods. An early type of performance ethnography is that pioneered by Victor and Edith Turner (along with Richard Schechner 1985) which involves the rehearsal or re-enactment of African rituals as a pedagogical device (Turner 1988: 139-155). A third approach, exemplified by Zarrilli (1998), applies ethnographic research methods to a performance genre with the researcher in full participation (see also Schechner 1985). Following Zarrilli (1998), in my ongoing research into Asian

combatives, “performance ethnography” means an ethnographic research strategy that takes place through the full participation of the researcher in the performance genre.^A

My intention here is to use the experience of researching *silat* to spell out some of performance ethnography’s salient theoretical features and to discuss its application alongside traditional and recent modes of ethnographic enquiry. I briefly discuss methods of visual ethnography and outline a method I call “reflexive exegesis” which I used to supplement performance ethnography.

Performance Ethnography

Performance ethnography as a tool of social enquiry has emerged from contemporary investigations into martial arts by theatre and performance theorists (Schechner 1985: 213-260, Zarrilli 1998). From 1976, Philip Zarrilli learned the Indian martial art *kalarippayattu* which provides the basis for actor training in *Kathkali* theatre in Kerala, South India. According to Zarrilli (1998: 255 n6), culture is not a passive frozen entity waiting “out there” to be discovered or something that may remain unsullied by the presence of the “objective” ethnographer. Following Fabian (1990: 18), Zarrilli (1998: 255 n6) considers the epistemology of performance ethnography to refer to the way people realize their culture through a fluid process of creating meaning, of cultural praxis, where ethnography essentially concerns communication and dialogical conversation rather than observation.

Accepting Malinowski’s (1948: 123) ideas advocating the full immersion of the anthropologist in “native culture,” earlier anthropologists nevertheless spurned the idea of full participation. For example, Evans-Pritchard, who was renowned for undergoing difficult fieldwork trials, rejected participation in the esoteric life of the Azande which would have required he become a witchdoctor himself.^B Evans-Pritchard [1937] (1977: 151) believed that little would be gained by “obtruding himself into the ceremonies as an actor” because he felt that as “a [colonial] European” he would not be taken seriously, and that his presence could have psychological consequences on the participants, possibly leading to changes in ritual and performance that would be difficult to verify. Furthermore, he believed that it would be “difficult to use the ordinary methods of critical investigating when one is actually engaged in ceremonial and is supposed to be an eager member of an institution” (ibid.). To solve the problem of gaining access into the secret society of witch doctors, Evans-Pritchard eventually persuaded his personal servant to be initiated into the witch doctors’ corporation, to report back with details of their organization and to ascertain their field of secrets (Farrer 2006b: 27).

Despite the difficulties, the benefits gained through direct open access into the performance process far outweigh the drawbacks. The problem of “demand characteristics” or “observer effect” may be overrated; in fact it is equally possible that the informants will ignore the ethnographer as irrelevant.^C More finely put, the role of

^A For my doctoral degree, whilst based at The National University of Singapore, I conducted a performance ethnography (1999-2004) of a transnational *silat* troupe called “Seni Silat Haqq.” From 1996-2005 I trained in various *silat* styles in Malaysia, Singapore, and the U.K., including *seni silat haqq*, *lima beradik*, *silat gayong*, *silat olahraga*, *cimande*, *grasio*, *setia hati*, and *kuntao Melaka*. Residing in Singapore for the past 9 years has provided me with the opportunity to observe hundreds of *silat* classes and demonstrations of wedding *silat*, and I have interviewed over one hundred *silat* masters (*guru silat*) and their followers in Malaysia and Singapore (see Farrer 2006b).

^B Evans-Pritchard traveled miles out into the Nuer territory to make contact only to find that the Nuer had left and that his servants had abandoned him in his tent the next morning (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 10).

^C Comment made by Ellis Finkelstein, a Manchester School anthropologist who took me under his wing and taught me the ethnographic method in 1999.

practitioner and performer may overshadow the researcher role in the eyes of the informants. Gaining the informed consent of one's informants is the first step to a genuine dialogical consultation. However, for most informants it was sufficient to just say that I was writing a book on *silat*.

Although I have encountered and learned from a host of *silat* experts, I openly followed two *guru silat* in particular. First, from 1996-98, I learned under Pak Ariffin, who is a *bulubalang* (bodyguard) to a Malaysian Prince. Aside from teaching his own eclectic and highly acrobatic blend of *silat*, Pak Ariffin is also a Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Imam, occasional actor and theatre director. The other profound influence upon my thinking about *silat* was Mohamad Din Mohamad (Pak Din), who resides in Singapore and Melaka. Pak Din is a professional artist, weapons collector, and mystical healer who stopped teaching regular classes in *silat* when his foot was severed due to a motorcycle accident.

Reflexive Exegesis

Due to the secrecy of *silat*, the performers themselves and the majority of the audience may be unaware of the hidden function and meaning of the movements (Farrer 2006a: 44 n11; Rashid 1990: 64). Echoing Plato's dictum, *guru silat* say they cannot teach you anything you do not already know. The inherent secrecy of *silat* means that it is inadvisable to rely solely upon verbal or written accounts from one source, and requires the researcher to cast the sampling net as wide as possible (Agar 1996; Becker 1998; Pelto 1970). Given these difficulties, in practical terms one method I used was to acquire information through long term dialogical consultation by finding out bits and pieces of information and then reporting these snippets back to several different *guru silat* over a period spanning five years. Each time I would offer a morsel in the hope that the *guru silat* would then elaborate more details leading to new material which I could then proceed to follow up. I call this method "reflexive exegesis," and it is best compared to doing a jigsaw puzzle without the box cover, where one gathers the pieces, looks for the edges, and locates the corners before the picture emerges.

Aside from writing up fieldnotes directly into my laptop computer I took several hundred photographs, recorded emails, telephone conversations, mobile phone text messages, and pages from website discussion forums.^D I used a Sony semi-pro digital video camera to document my observations of rituals, practice, rehearsals, theatre and everyday activity. With a Sennheiser "torpedo" microphone mounted on the camera I found that I could record speech at a distance of twenty-five meters away. For example, although the Special Forces instructor, Cikgu Ezhar, allowed me to film his initiation ritual from a distance, both he and I were surprised that the microphone picked up his whispered incantations and when I showed him the footage, he generously explained the entire ritual to me. It is one thing to film, observe, and perform, but it is essential to gain an expert indigenous explanation, and this is when dialogical consultation really comes into its own. I also used the camera to record long Malay monologues such as Pak Ariffin once lecturing me non-stop for three whole hours—an ego bruising encounter I am loath to replay.

Evans-Pritchard [1937] (1977: 153) made the comment that when informants fall out; it is to the anthropologist's advantage. However, in the modern era where informants read the anthropologist's work, disputes among informants lead to all kinds of complications, and one must be especially careful in preparing the final script for publication both to safeguard the interests of informants, and to provide as accurate and unbiased an account as possible, taking into account the views of the different factions.

^D Festinger *et al* (1964) *When Prophecy Fails* fed my obsession with data collection.

Beyond Dialogue

Recently performance ethnography has been challenged by notions of research-in-practice or practice-based research (Welton 2003). However, to the sociologist or social anthropologist, the elision of *ethnography* in such formulae appears rather gauche, and here I will confine my remarks to practitioner ethnography and performance ethnography respectively.

Commenting upon my article “Deathscapes of the Malay Martial Artist” (Farrer 2006a), written for a special issue on “Noble Death,” in the journal *Social Analysis*, editors Michael Roberts and Arthur Saniotis point out that they prefer the term “practitioner ethnography” to “performance ethnography” for my research, noting that “[w]here feasible it is the best form of participant observation” (Roberts and Saniotis 2006: 12). As I understand it, practitioner ethnography is a qualitative sociological method employed in studies of everything from criminals, maids, the police, prisons and schools (Bryman ed. 2001). Moreover, practitioner ethnography conjures up images of Carlos Castaneda downing loads of hallucinogenic drugs prior to taking flight, or perhaps paradoxically what may be seen as worse, Castaneda “imagining” that he downed loads of hallucinogenics, prior to making the ethnography up, in which case his work would be better described as “fantasy ethnography” (not that this should a priori be dismissed as an illegitimate endeavour) (Castaneda 1998). Obviously the boundaries between academic and amateur participation and practice may become blurred. In my case I had already learned *silat haqq* for two years in North London before I set out in 1999 to apply ethnographic research methods to it. Hence my performance or practitioner ethnography grew from my participation in *silat*. In an ironic twist of the anthropologist going native, my case was one of the practitioner going anthropologist. Nevertheless, I believe the term “performance ethnography” better describes my work, primarily because it emerges from the anthropology of performance which focuses on outstanding dramatic ritual and performance events, and not solely upon so-called mundane day-to-day “reality.” Furthermore, performance ethnography engages a current in the anthropology of performance, embodiment, and experience (Csordas 1994, 2002; Kapferer 1991, 1997; Turner 1988, Turner and Bruner eds. 1986; E. Turner *et al* 1992), which has exerted a considerable influence upon my theoretical perspective.

Roberts and Saniotis (2006: 12) perceptively hint that practitioner ethnography goes *beyond dialogue*. I would like to flesh out this comment in my own way. In practical terms, “dialogical consultation” may not be feasible in the study of religious cults, secret societies, and what are sometimes referred to by anthropologists as “stoic cultures.”^E For example, in *silat* and Islamic Sufism, it is considered inappropriate for the student (*murid*) to question the master; to do so is considered to go against the tenets of etiquette and polite behaviour (*adab*) (cf. Nagata 1984: 135; Sheppard 1956). Indeed, *guru silat* Pak Ariffin of Seni Silat Haqq proclaims “I, my, and why are from *Shaytan*” making it sinful to question the master, and therefore severely limiting dialogical consultation. Thankfully the same problem did not occur with Pak Din. Of course, a covert approach to research is one way to tackle the problem of secrecy, but aside from the ethical problems, it would not overcome the injunction against asking questions. In fact I did carry out a brief period of covert research on Seni Silat Haqq Melayu in 1999, but after several consultations with my friend and mentor, Dr. Ellis Finkelstein, I was persuaded that the

^E Malays can appear notoriously stoical. For example, a senior American anthropologist once complained to me “We stayed in the village for eighteen months and nobody would talk to us.” Another anthropologist, a Fulbright scholar learning dance in Kelantan, said that even after months of practice nobody would tell her what the moves meant, or why you did them one way and not another, so she abandoned her project on dance and embodiment (Farrer 2006b: 25).

covert approach suffers from more drawbacks than advantages and adopted an overt approach instead.^F

Going “beyond dialogue” through performance ethnography is appropriate when sober informants relate tales of seeing dragons fly, of stabbing evil spirits in the night, of summoning ghosts or the shadow soul (*bayang*), and of plunging their hands into boiling hot oil only to remain unburned due to the Divine intervention of Allah. It is apparent that scepticism, credulity, and gullibility are cultural constructs that act in different ways as cognitive boundaries according to whether one adopts a mystical, religious or rational attitude. Moreover, the realm of the “literal” clearly has a different meaning for most Malays than for the secular European (most easily noted when jokes fall flat). However, venturing “beyond dialogue,” I agree with ethnographic film writers Barbash and Taylor that it is important to regard “life as it is lived rather than as it is reported on” (1997: 36). Similarly, Finkelstein (1993: 9-10) in his ethnography of an English prison, found it necessary to privilege participant observation over the survey technique, because what people actually *do* is discrepant with what they *say* they do.^G [Of course, what people say and what they don’t say, *is* partly what they do—Austin’s (1975) “performative speech act”—and whatever its inverse would be.] Adopting the logic of performance ethnography, the anthropology of experience (Turner and Bruner eds. 1986; E. Turner *et al* 1992), and the methodology of ethnographic filmmaking, where experience supersedes second-hand news, led me to plunge my hands twice into apparently boiling oil with *silat gayong* as part of their initiation rites (fig. 1) (see Farrer 2006b: 299-335).

^F Covert ethnography is considered unethical, and informants tend to get suspicious. Without “informed consent” legal problems may arise with regard to publication (see also Babbie 2006: 274-302).

^G Finkelstein’s (1993, 1996) approach is influenced by La Pierre (1934: 230-7), who challenges (Weberian) claims that attitudes dictate actions. Accompanied by a Chinese couple La Pierre visited 137 guesthouses, hotels, and trailer parks in 1930s America. La Pierre asked each establishment if they would serve Asian guests in a follow up survey, and fifty percent of those who replied said they would not. However, La Pierre whilst on his travels with the Chinese couple had only been refused service once (Farrer 2006b: 29).



Fig. 1. Nazim and I share a cauldron

In theoretical terms, going beyond dialogue or talk means that the nature of the subject may be extended to bodily engagement and agency. Here by “beyond dialogue” I refer to beyond talk, text, signs, symbols, in short, *representations*, to address performance and practice as constitutive rather than primarily reflective factors in the production of meaning and identity (Csordas 1994, 1999, 2002; Hughes-Freeland 1998; Kapferer 2004). Via performance ethnography, anthropology may take the analysis of embodied performance beyond a supplementary role to textual or symbolic analysis (pace Csordas 2002: 7, 241; Lowell Lewis 1992), and become a field of “sensuous scholarship” in its own right (Stoller 1997). Such a renewed emphasis on the body, embodied practice and performance, eschews the colonial logocentric emphasis placed upon text to the exclusion of embodied practice and the cultural conditioning of the body, to consider the application and agency of the body, whether formulated in terms of hexis (Bourdieu 1977), performativity (Butler 1990), pragmatic somaesthetics (Schusterman 2000: 141-145), or the gendered and racial bodily invasion of space (Puwar 2004). In my case, an embodied approach led me to reformulate longstanding conceptions of Malay shamanism and Malay magic which had excluded the *guru silat*. My thesis brings from out of the shadows the “war magician” or “warrior shaman” whose necromantic “spells” operate through the dance of *silat*, where the movements may summon the spirits of ancestral heroes into the living body of the performer (Farrer 2006a, 2006b).

Hazards of Martial Arts Performance Ethnography

Ethical guidelines for social research hinge on three principles: minimal risk, informed consent, and the right to privacy, principles that apply to the collection and publication of data. Due to the inherent dangers of martial arts performance ethnography, minimal risk means not getting injured and trying not to harm those one trains with; an important criterion when you are knife training and continually being tested in an oppressive boot-camp environment. However, a certain amount of violence seems almost inevitable in the performance ethnography of combative disciplines as I illustrate below.

Cikgu Ezhar would stuff us with tea and fritters (*jempit-jempit*) before an intense bout of throws and takedowns done on the concrete yard outside his house. One time, I was practising takedowns with an obtuse English *silat* practitioner, who swept my legs out from under me, mounted my shoulders, and punched me so hard on the right eyebrow that my ears rang for three days afterwards. Literally seeing red, for my turn, I knocked him down and kicked him. Another time, whilst I was learning knife fighting with a stocky Malay policeman with a surly “I’m going to kill you” gangster disposition, I got slung about like a rag doll for half an hour. Eventually I got fed up with this and decked him with a crafty kung fu kick to a pressure point just above the ankle, whereupon *guru silat* Ezhar ran up to me and yelled “Don’t hurt him: [do] you know how long it took me to find someone to train with you?” In both of these cases it took a certain level of violence for me to earn the informant’s respect, and only after these painful encounters would they open up to me, taciturn grunts and stormy brows lifting to be replaced by smiles, laughter and valuable information.

Returning to “minimal risk,” having access to my own car in the field made a huge difference, since with increased mobility I could follow the *guru silat* around and make extended trips across the length and breadth of Malaysia. With the *guru silat* at the wheel of my supped-up re-bored Mitsubishi, we would race across the winding roads in the mountains of Pahang and Perak, *The Chemical Brothers* blasting out so loud it blew my speakers. However, driving in Malaysia is often fast and furious with motorists (as often as not Singaporean vehicles in the southern states) illegally travelling at speeds of over 240 km/h on the highways (more than double the speed limit), whilst ancient lorries carrying huge piles of freshly hewn logs chug along in the battle for the slow lane. Carnage is the result.

Conclusion

This article highlights elements of my performance ethnography of the Malay martial art *silat* (1999-2006) to argue against recent misguided notions that performance ethnography is reducible to a theoretical discourse of so-called “critical ethnography;” and to oppose cultural, theatre, or performance theorists who would drop “ethnography” from so-called practitioner-or-performer-based research. I maintain that performance ethnography is best regarded as a fieldwork method of considerable utility to the ethnographer of difficult, secret, or stoic societies, and is a method that is well served by methods of visual ethnography, and by what I term “reflexive exegesis.” In regard to early theories of martial arts performance ethnography, I supplement the discursive dialogical model with a view that emphasises embodied practice and performance, a method which underscores what people actually do rather than what they say they do. Finally, my research indicates that credulity, both of anthropologists and their informants, is a topic that warrants further research.

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In Conversation with Prof. Wang Gung Wu

Interviewed by A/P Vineeta Sinha

Professor Wang Gung Wu is the director of the East Asian Institute in the National University of Singapore and the Deputy Chairman of the Chinese Heritage Centre from year 2001. Professor Wang was Vice-Chancellor of The University of Hong Kong from 1986 to 1995, and was Chairman of The Institute of East Asian Political Economy (1996-1997) before it was reconstituted as The East Asian Institute. He is also Faculty Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS), and Emeritus Professor, Australian National University, Canberra.

He is also an active participant of numerous boards both international and local. He is also member of Editorial Board or Advisory Editor of many international journals, including Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, The China Journal, The China Quarterly, Modern Asian Studies, Japanese Journal of Political Science, China Studies, Pacific Affairs, The Pacific Review, China: an International Journal, Contemporary Southeast Asia, The Round Table, Asian Studies Review, Asian Culture, and Journal of the Malaysian Branch, Royal Asiatic Society.

His publications include A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese, 1959; The Cultural Background of the Peoples of Malaysia: Chinese culture, 1962 (in Malay); A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese, 1969, 1988; Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia, 1992; China and the Chinese Overseas, 1994 (in Chinese); The Chinese Way: China's position in international relations, 1995. He has also received various awards and honours recognizing his contributions.

VS: *Thank you very much for this opportunity. I would like to begin by talking about your contribution to research on Chinese history and migration. How did you come to this field in the first place?*

WGW: I took my first degree in the University of Malaya, when it was in Singapore. It was a very small, new university, formed by merging Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine. The number of subjects available to the Arts students was very limited. We really had very few choices. For quite a few years, all we could choose from were the four subjects, English literature, history, geography and economics. The university followed the system whereby students did three subjects for a general degree and then, in the fourth year, if you are admitted into the honors class, you could specialize in one subject. In my case, I was given the choice of the three: English, history or economics. I was uncertain which to choose. My personal preference was for literature but the practical thing to do would have been to do economics. I did work at my economics courses and did like much of it. I thought history was an interesting subject to be studied for its own sake but in career terms, economics was the practical thing and my fellow students thought that as well. Literature was my private love. In the end I didn't do economics. I was admitted to the honors class but, frankly, thought that the professor of history was far more interesting. His name was Cyril Northcote Parkinson. He was responsible for the Parkinson's Law that is now part of the language of administration and management. And he was really a fascinating person. He was a naval historian but not at all conventional. Although his whole career up to the point I knew him was straight naval history, Anglo-French naval, battles, in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere, in fact, whenever he taught us, he was extremely stimulating. The three

lecturers who taught me history in my first three years were also inspiring, so that too encouraged me to take history. When I saw that Parkinson was going to be the man in charge of the honours class, I thought that a year with him would be intellectually far more satisfying. One of the reasons why I didn't do English literature was also because the professor, Graham Hough, had left. He was very good but he left to take a job in Cambridge. We lost him, hence my decision not to go further with English Literature. But I was not someone who set out to do history from the beginning. I actually did poorly in history at school and just barely managed to pass. And I remember when I came to register for history, the history lecturer who was registering me looked at my results and said, don't you think you should be doing geography or something? I had actually done better in geography in school. Anyway, I didn't take his advice and in the end it was history that turned out to be the subject that interested me.

VS: How did you become interested in Chinese history?

WGW: I had actually gone to China for higher studies. My first university was in China. After I finished school in Ipoh, I went to take the entrance examinations to the National Central University in Nanjing, in 1947, and was offered a place in that university. I was there for a year and a half. When the communists arrived, and civil war was going to engulf the city, Nanjing was abandoned and the university closed. I hung around the campus for more than a month, but my parents persuaded me to come home. So I did. I had already done the first year in Nanjing and was in my second year. What I saw of the tail-end of the Chinese civil war was another factor that influenced my later interest in history. When I decided to do history, the context at that time saw a shift towards the history of the West in Asia, from the early interactions to the growing dominance of Asia by the West. This reminds me that, just about the time I completed my history honours year, KM Panikkar brought out his *Asia and Western Dominance* where he wrote about the Vasco Da Gama epoch of Asian history. My understanding of Asian history at that point was that Asian states were still very much alive and kicking until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. It wasn't till the nineteenth century that the Europeans really began to dominate. Before that, they were largely controlling some islands and clinging onto bits of coastal land. During the first three centuries after Da Gama reached India, they did become more influential but were not dominant. And the Europeans were fighting amongst themselves as well as fighting Asian powers. For most of that time, they were actually quite respectful of Asian cultures and did not see themselves as superior. It was only in the nineteenth century, after the Industrial Revolution, that they obtained the extra economic power to translate commercial preeminence into military and political superiority. That was what gave them the edge and, from then onwards, Asia did not have a chance against them.

The European powers had also learnt from their experience in Asia. They learnt to stop fighting one another and decided to carve out spheres of influence to avoid unnecessary fighting among themselves. And that gave them even greater opportunities to dominate whatever territories that each power had carved out. The Dutch in Indonesia or Netherlands East Indies, the British in India and later Burma and Malaya, and so on. They stopped fighting each other by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The last great struggle was the Anglo-French battles of the Napoleonic era, after which the British became the number one power. So Western dominance really came about only during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. KM Panikkar was right, the Europeans became dominant, but it was too early to date it from Vasco Da Gama. Vasco Da Gama was barely clinging to bits of Cochin and Calicut. On the contrary, I thought that, between Vasco Da Gama's arrival in India down to the eighteenth century, Manchu China was actually still very strong and had actually expanded its empire into Central Asia.

So I was interested in how the Chinese eventually recovered from that period of western dominance and how a new China came into being in our time. When Mao Zedong announced that China had stood up on the first of October 1949, that was just a week before I became an undergraduate at the University of Malaya. That is a week I cannot forget! I was thinking, how did these Chinese become Communists? What is in Chinese tradition that would make them Communist? How could they have enabled the Chinese Communist Party to defeat the Nationalists immediately after a war against Japan during which the Nationalists had become powerful? It was a time when these Nationalists were, if not at the peak of their power, at least enjoying the triumphs of heightened nationalism. How could these Communists have defeated the Nationalists? That was already one of the questions about Chinese history that interested me. Related closely to this, of course, was another question, how could this great civilization of 2000 years collapse to a point when the Chinese people were no longer confident of their own civilization? And many young Chinese were indeed no longer proud of their civilization and were prepared to abandon it. In the 1920s and 30s, young intellectuals in China were saying, "Out with all this feudal, traditional nonsense, we must be progressive, we must learn from the West, we must take their new ideas and transform ourselves into a rich and powerful country". Why would people say that? So that's where I started, my starting-point, so to speak.

Unfortunately, in 1953, when I was doing my honours year, the conditions in British Malaya, of fighting communism, of Emergency regulations being in force and the high degree of surveillance of the people, there was no way I could have done Chinese history seriously. All Chinese were suspected of being communists, the way that all Muslims are suspected of being terrorists today. It is very similar. I find it familiar when compared to the way we young Chinese at that time were suspect, especially someone who could read and write Chinese and had been to China. As far as the British and the Malayan governments, all the government officials and police officers, were concerned, we were all suspicious. So I couldn't seriously do work on modern China without all kinds of difficulties. I was not an anti-communist, not ideological in that way. If anything, I was more sympathetic to those people who were idealistic about what they were doing. It turned out badly for these idealists in the end but, at the time, I admired them for the sacrifices they were prepared to make to try to achieve what they wanted.

But the atmosphere was just wrong for the kind of history that first interested me. Although I started out with modern China, by the time I decided to do my Masters degree, it was quite clear that that would not be possible. As for my professor, he basically said that he would support me but I should know the difficulties here. So I shifted to the history of Asian trade. I decided to work on the Nanhai trade and went back in time to study Chinese trading relations in the South China Seas. I actually went back 2000 years and wrote my Master's thesis on the first thousand years, from the Han dynasty down to the tenth century. Well, that was politically correct, no problems, and I could also use that opportunity to learn early Chinese history thoroughly. There was nobody to teach me, so I had to learn what I could by myself.

The university's library was quite inadequate, but I was a bit fortunate in that, just as I was about to start on my work, the university established the Department of Chinese Studies. They did so not because they were that keen on China. They did that because of the pressure put on the colonial government to allow the Malayan Chinese to found Nanyang University now that Chinese school students could not further their studies in Communist China. Again, the context was local politics. The British were very concerned that, if they resisted that pressure all the way, they would have a rebellion on their hands and the young Chinese school students would then become even more left wing and radical. So it was a kind of politics of concession but also politics of contention. The

British were very unwilling to allow the foundation of Nanyang University, so they created the Chinese department in the hope of satisfying local demands, that is, by enabling Chinese school graduates to do Chinese at the University of Malaya. But the Chinese were too clever to accept that. They recognized that it was a diversionary move and they really wanted their own university. So finally the British gave in and allowed a Chinese language university that was privately funded. But they were not keen on it and only allowed the community to set up a company to run the university. The politics of that whole affair was extremely complicated. But, as a result, the Chinese department was set up at the University of Malaya, and it began to buy Chinese books for the library, of course, mainly traditional books. That was fine for me, since I was pursuing a traditional subject for the first thousand years of the millennium. So I had the basic reference sources to work with and that enabled me to complete my Masters. When I went on to do my PhD, I had hoped to go beyond that and get into more recent history. As it turned out, since I was still trying to learn more about Chinese history, and there was still so much more to learn, and I was finding pre-modern history very interesting, I decided to continue in that field. When I went to London and met a scholar who was willing to supervise me and found him keen to encourage me, that clinched it. Thus the tenth century became the focus of my PhD research. That's how I landed in "medieval" history, to use this very European term to cover my research period.

When I finished that work and came back to Malaya to teach, I knew I was handicapped in many ways. I had limited social science exposure, did not have the kind of classical training that the humanities would normally expect. My modern history training, when applied to the study of ancient times, wasn't really helpful. Furthermore, I also didn't have a chance to hone my skills in modern history research. So I really had much to do to make up for my shortcomings.

VS: But one could also say that you were liberated, because you were not bound by the constraints of disciplinary knowledge and therefore you were free to carve your own...

WGW: That would be a positive interpretation of a rather unfortunate set of circumstances! Yes, I suppose, in the end, I didn't lose anything, I gained a depth of understanding of the past which helped me later on when I came back to modern times. When I came back to teach in the university, I was assigned to teach the period from the beginnings of Western impact on Asia to the time of Western dominance, mainly the 16th to 18th centuries, and teach what was Asia's response; in short, what was happening in Asia at that time. I was given the job of handling that period of East Asian history, especially China. Which was fine, it suited me very well because it gave me a chance to get a bit closer to modern times. It was China from the 1500 to about 1800, and gave me a chance to learn more about that period. I enjoyed that enormously, I have always learnt so much from teaching.

VS: Yes. This was in Hong Kong?

WGW: No, that was here at the University of Malaya in Singapore. This is where I came back to, this Bukit Timah campus, not exactly in this building but the one just around the corner next to the present Faculty of Law main office. I had been here as an undergraduate, and then taught here as well. But in 1959, they started the campus in Kuala Lumpur and, because I was a Malayan and Singapore was still a colony then, I thought I would like to join that brand new campus. They asked for volunteers and I asked to go to KL. As a result, I left Singapore in 1959 and didn't come back till 1996. It was a long gap. I was in Kuala Lumpur for about eleven years and then after that I went to the Australian National University in Canberra.

Not long after I got to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the newly independent Federation of Malaya, I became head of department and professor of history, and it became quite clear that I would need to concentrate on Southeast Asian and Malaysian history. That also gave me the chance to teach modern history, especially that of Malaya and the region. All my students, especially the students I was supervising, were doing either Malaysian history or Southeast Asian history. Such subjects were very much at the core of our department's courses. In addition, I had also developed a particular interest in teaching the theory and method of history and that was why I became interested in the social sciences. When I began to teach theory, it was obvious that historians on the whole didn't talk much about theory. They were probably wise not to have done that and leave it to the philosophers. So I really had to turn to other disciplines for guidance. It was very stimulating to look at the theoretical work done in related fields, ideas and methods that historians were actually using, often without acknowledgement and sometimes without a clear understanding. Nevertheless, there was a growing recognition that what these disciplines brought forth was actually very helpful to historians and historians should become more self-aware about what they were doing.

VS: Could you mention some of these works that pulled you into Social Science theory?

WGW: Normally with these courses you teach historiography, and begin with all the work done by historians in the past. Herodotus and Thucydides in Europe, Suma Qian in China, and Ibn Khaldun in the Muslim world, all the way to the present. And the more you come to the twentieth century and look at the work of modern historians, the more you find the professionalisation of the field. This meant that historians became more and more focused on trying to be different from everybody else, and establish history as a distinct discipline. The Germans made a very serious attempt to do this, responding to the rise of the Social Sciences. Before that, historians thought they could cover everything of the past, and base their skills largely on their classical training. But many wanted modern history to be more like a science, so they came to focus on archival research. They felt that the use of archival records and first-hand documentation was what distinguished historical science from other fields. Social scientists may work with the more contemporary methodologies that were being developed, for example all kinds of statistical and quantitative data, but historians would concentrate on official archives. This gave the advantage to subjects like diplomatic history, where the records of government-to-government relations were kept. So that focus became very strong. I was trained to do that by historians who were keen on archival research. That was good training which I greatly appreciated. But when I started to teach theory and method myself, I began to realize that, while you can read all the archives you like, there really was too much for any single historian to master and organize into a coherent story without careful selection. And if you have to select and interpret what is selected, you would need a frame in which to ask your questions. You would need some sort of hypothesis to start with because there is just too much out there and you can make little of the archives without one. In other words, you have to start with something, with your premises.

And where do you get your premises from? On what basis do you formulate your premises? In other words, you have to bear in mind the kind of sociology of knowledge behind the premises, how much are you influenced by the dominant ideas and judgments of your own times, by your own personal experiences. How these actually lead you to formulate certain kind of questions. You need to be aware how much the events around you influence the kinds of questions you ask when you look at the past. So that made me much more self-conscious about what we historians were doing and I became dissatisfied with this idea of historians depending mainly on archives without realizing that that's not

enough. I learnt a lot from my own students. As we were trying to write Malaysian history, we saw that, if we worked mainly from the archives, we would end up with the British point of view and little else because what we would have done was to pick what the British said about this, that or the other. If you depend on the archives, you could never free yourself of the biases recorded in the official records, the elitist, upper class and bureaucratic interpretation of events. We knew that, for our Malaysian history, that simply was not right. This is also so elsewhere, because if you look at the whole of Southeast Asian studies in general, all the historians of Southeast Asia faced the same problem. They too cannot depend on archives for a fuller understanding of their history. If you do research on Indonesian history and you depend on the Dutch archives, you'll just end up with just one narrow perspective. So Southeast Asian historians could not do what many modern Chinese and Japanese historians tended to do, which was to depend on their archives. The Japanese and Chinese are different because they have large and comprehensive archives of their own which are not foreign-dominated. Southeast Asians (except possibly the Thais) didn't have that. As a result, historians have to turn to other sources, like oral history and other so called secondary sources, and had to acquire new skills to use such secondary sources convincingly. A lot of this meant reading newspapers and magazines of the time, and the analyses of the writings, as well as the memories, of journalists and various other people who had lived through the times. All these sources became more important. It made historians realize that there is a lot to learn from the Social Sciences. How do you control such a wide range of materials? How do you make them valid for your historical work?

VS: Yes. So this was a radical take on history, this kind of turn to Social Science. Was it resisted? Were there individuals, historians trained in the old school who were uncomfortable with this?

WGW: Yes, some of my colleagues continued to use the British archives. I'm not criticizing that. That was a job that still needed to be done and we need scholars to do that. If nobody read the archives, there's something wrong with that too. The archives actually provides you with a frame, it's a frame that you can start with. But if you approach it critically, and not accept that frame as a given and work only within that frame, and look at that frame from outside, then having such a frame gives you a start. If you're totally without a frame, that would be like looking at nature where, if there's no frame, and no kind of focus, there could never be a work of art. So this is what the archival frame does. Where archives exist, they help you provide a frame. And every historian should be trained how to deal with archives. The point that I learnt, and all my colleagues learnt to understand, was to train our students to go beyond it. After learning to use the archives, don't just depend on it. As historians, they also have to learn how to control the materials beyond that. I started to read and re-read the work of social scientists, particularly the anthropologists, who seem the closest to us historians.

VS: Which ones did you read? Do you remember which ones made an impact on you?

WGW: Well, a bunch of anthropologists were working for the government on Malaysia. On Malaysian aborigines, on Malay society. Some of them were not professional anthropologists but they were working in that framework.

VS: Colonial administrators?

A: Yes, for example, Raymond Firth, and his wife, on the Malays, Maurice Freedman and Bill Skinner on the Chinese, in Singapore and Thailand respectively. There were others working on the aborigines.

VS: And you mentioned the sociology of knowledge, so were you like, reading these and other such perspectives?

WGW: Oh yes. To be fair to my teachers of the colonial era, they introduced that as philosophical background.

VS: Yes, within the context of history training you mean?

WGW: I remember reading quite a bit of philosophy. I was already reading Popper and Hayek. When I was an undergraduate, I did economics and was introduced to other parts of Social Science. So I was not entirely innocent. Economists were already pushing us to look at that and when you do economics you do get a sense of the complexities of political economy. Those were very exciting times. And it was not professional sociology or professional social sciences that attracted us. We were reading Karl Marx and, with him, you can't get away from a wide range of social sciences. Before I was trained as a historian, I was reading the Communist Manifesto and whatever we could find of what was considered scientific and progressive at the time, including a few key writings of Lenin and Mao Zedong. These were banned books, but we read them and managed not to get caught.

VS: Yes. So the training was very inter-disciplinary.

WGW: That's not training.

VS: Well, certainly exposure...

WGW: Yes that's exposure, that's largely through debating amongst ourselves. My generation was an interesting one. I just can't imagine it today. It was after the war and many of my fellow students were older students. I didn't lose too many years because I was able to catch up in school after the war ended, but many others had been ready to go to university in 1941 and therefore lost at least four years. After the war they had to start again and some didn't get to the university until 1947, 1948, or even 1949. So amongst my fellow students were people who had to interrupt their studies, including some who fought in the INA [Indian National Army]. One of them was my roommate in the dormitories. And there were others who were close to people involved in fighting against the Japanese, or in one way or another resisting the Japanese. There was the INA that sided with the Japanese, and the people who were against the Japanese. Amongst the students were people who had been through some harrowing experiences. So when they became undergraduates after the war, they were relatively mature. Thus a lot of our learning was informal, unorthodox and, in many cases, may be described as anti-establishment.

VS: Would you say the best kind of learning?

WGW: Oh yes. But anyway, I was not entirely innocent. As students of economics, we were taught the classical work of people like Marshall and his followers and, in particular, the "revisionist" work of Keynes, because that was the time when Keynesian economics was still in the ascendant. So we were familiar with Keynesian economics as a kind of realistic British response to Marx that enabled Britain to avoid revolution. What we learnt about Marx and what Marx was predicting, was met by the ideas of Keynes who, in his way, showed that classical economics could not deal with the problems of liberal capitalism. A completely new kind of economics was needed to solve those problems. There was a need for the judicious use of state power to intervene in the economy in ways that could prevent social disorder and revolution. As students, we were all familiar with that. We argued with our teachers. Some were proponents of classical economics and prone to argue, "Yes, but..." But they encouraged us to read and think more about what these ideas meant for our part of the world.

All that had been set aside when I studied ancient Chinese history for the next few years. But when, after 1959, I turned again to look at modern times and at methodology and theory, much of what I had learnt came back. So it was not too hard for me. I

needed to realize that the early informal learning was relevant to the study of history. And I brought that thought into my teaching and to my students. My students were very interested. But of course the subject was still politically sensitive. Even today, there are certain subjects you just don't get into too deeply, particularly with students. Quite frankly, when I was teaching in Kuala Lumpur, and I'm sure this was true in Singapore as well, some university teachers were being watched. I don't know who was watching but I was warned about it. I was warned that Special Branch was looking out for students who would report for them. They paid them a kind of retainer fee, or something like that, to report on what lecturers were saying in class. So I had to be careful. You may think you're being objective but it is chastening to think that you could be seen as something of a threat. I have to say that there were constraints, but I learnt a lot anyway from teaching my students. That was how I opened myself to a lot of other academic disciplines, in fact, to the point of not being too troubled by disciplinary boundaries. And I have been like that ever since. There are historians who ask me, "You still a historian?" I think they have genuine doubts!

VS: I wanted to bring you back to the present and ask you about your views on China. Much has been made about the, it's sort of a euphemism, a metaphor that one hears in every domain, including the Social Sciences. What is your view about this current euphoria about the rise of China and how it impacts Social Sciences or Social Sciences research?

WGW: The ramifications are actually quite great. Exactly what the impact would be like years from now, I can't say. For now, I'm not sure it's all euphoria. There's also fear, anxieties about being threatened and mixed feelings of opportunity and risk on the subject. Going back to the question I asked myself when I was young. What went wrong with Chinese society at the turn of the 20th century? What drove so many Chinese intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s to set aside tradition in order to learn from the West? In 1949, the iconoclasts basically succeeded when the Chinese Communist Party won. They supported a kind of Western heresy, the communist ideals that they took was almost straight from Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin. They may have had had their own understanding of what these thinkers predicted, and certainly had reservations about the applicability of some of the goals for China. But they were under the discipline as communist party members. You could say that they still have that power structure and the commitment to party discipline, but at that time, the purpose was to absorb the development goals that the Soviet Union had devised. The Chinese learnt well from that model and some of the leaders were ready to give up their traditional values in order to better ingest key parts of that Western heresy.

But what is so interesting for historians and the other social scientists is to see, whatever you may consciously want to do, that there are developments you can't control or prevent. What happens when someone like Mao Zedong, a very Chinese person who was the product of the Chinese elitist tradition, found that he could not help acting out even that which he professed to reject? At one level, he totally dismissed the Confucian past and talked in the most romantic terms about revolution and class struggle. The language he used was highly inflammatory, stressing the use of violence to destroy the feudal past, and to rid the party off the "new socialist man" that did not meet his standards of revolutionary fervour. At another level in his own thinking, beneath all the slogans, his early educational background came through, and he was still a traditional rebel leader. Even the way he imparted the "socialist" values he took from the West was still Chinese. Like memorizing classical texts, learning was a very holistic process. It's not analytical. The Maoist ideologues claimed that theirs was scientific socialism but what they meant by scientific was essentially to adopt what Lenin and other Marxists had deemed to be scientific. They learnt their doctrines very uncritically, and that itself is a

subject of psychological and sociological interest, part of the sociology of knowledge under a specific set of political conditions. This raises questions like how do you structure new kinds of power when you are not really able to shake off older traditions of power? More traditional political culture has survived than most people realize. So when you talk in modern terms, and the language and rhetoric is seemingly modern, but the thinking and the underlying knowledge framework and, in particular, the way new knowledge may be used as a tool of power, as a means of gaining, maintaining, manipulating and controlling, power has much to do with people's deep-rooted political culture. And the people around, and depending on, the power centre are aware of that. There is no escape from this because leaders have to deal with their people, and here we are talking about hundreds of millions of people. How the leaders rule over them, control them and keep them acquiescent, depends on how well they know their psychology. These leaders have to respond to how their people live, what they think is right and wrong, what they understand about authority and accept as legitimate. All these deep-rooted values have nothing to do with Marxism. And this is manifested in the way China has developed during the past three decades. Much of what has happened reminds us how little we can do to shake off the peculiarities of a historical political culture. When that is taken into account, becoming modern is often a misunderstanding if not an illusion. Even when it is real in the conscious mind at a rational moment, it cannot be separated from what is actually there on the ground among the people's shared hopes and desires.

I would say that this is true of India, Southeast Asia and the Islamic world today. The Chinese experience shows that, even when you have gone as far as what Mao Zedong did in the Cultural Revolution, with his calls for the total negation of the past, calling upon the young people to burn books and symbols of the past and take things out of historic temples and have them destroyed, what happened was that it didn't change the basic values of China's authoritarian traditions. Mao Zedong didn't manage to change himself! Even while he was calling for revolution, he was about as traditionally emperor-like as you could imagine. He didn't seem to realize how he would be seen, because in his own mind, he was the opposite of an emperor. Apart from his appetite for female company, he might even be compared to Mahatma Gandhi if you accept his claims to be someone who lived very simply and was always caring for the welfare of the rural poor. Even though he was ensconced deeply in the former Manchu Qing Imperial Palace, he saw himself as a simple man of the people. So you see how he managed to deceive himself about that. And his self-image was very important. It should have been consistent with his ideology and the rhetoric that he constantly used. But in practice, when it came to manipulating people and using power, arousing people to do what he wanted, he used very traditional ways that were consistent with the political culture operating in that environment.

I think the deep roots of political culture are very important problems for the social sciences. When you look at how people are studying Islam and the strong connection between politics and religion today, perhaps they should also look at China. China is not a particularly religious country and the issue is not the connection with politics, but there are religious and moral values that matter in daily practice. Although they are supposed to have been set aside and marginalized, they are still very much in evidence. These values didn't go away for long or went very far. And it is an important matter to bear in mind when you examine China today, and look at how the young people are learning from the West again. You will see that many of them are learning in a different way. Having set aside one set of Western values received from Russia, they now look at another set that is being received from the United States. It's not Marx anymore, and they seem to have gone much of the way towards Wall Street. That is like going all the

way in the opposite direction. But again, the question remains, have they really changed that much? There is evidence that, among some of them, their Chineseness could be as deeply rooted as it ever was. As the young in the cities are now reading the tabloids from Hollywood and New York, or learning everything they can from the latest novels and the latest social science books and journals from the West, they are picking up much that is new. But how deeply does all this go? I think one has to be very cautious in interpreting the changes. When I read the young Chinese scholars today, I find that they can quote any number of the top social scientists in the West, the best economists, political scientists, and sociologists. They can translate their work and quote from these writings extensively. But I wonder how far they actually accept the premises of those social sciences? They look at the methodology, and certainly as pure methodology, and they find no difficulty learning that. Just as in the physical and mathematical sciences, the technical methods can be learnt by anybody. But, as we know, these can be learnt for completely different purposes. Social science is no different. You learn the methods. You learn economics, the financial calculations, the statistics, but you can use it for different purposes. What you use it for would be rooted in your own continuities, your own past. My understanding is that you can't get away from that. So I really don't know how this fascination with the most up-to-date social science will translate in the long run when the writings are all available in Chinese and widely used by the top people in the field who have often been so well trained in America. If they stay on in America and become Americanized, that's a different story. But if they go back to China and really want to fit into their own society and address their own people, then all they can confidently bring would be the basic methodologies and techniques, but not the underlying premises that the Americans work with.

VS: In that context, do you think the notion of academic colonialism and Eurocentrism typifies Chinese Social Science today? This sort of turning to the West for...

WGW: In a way I'm not particularly concerned for the Chinese because they can't escape this stage in their history. They will learn and learn, but they will never go beyond a certain point. Ultimately, we are talking about an ancient civilization. This is not a general experience available to all peoples. It would be different if you didn't have much of a tradition of your own. Then it's much easier to have one new tradition completely take over. For example, if a people have very simple ideas about their lives and you introduce them to a religion that offers them a great deal more than they have ever known, they could be expected to accept the total set of new values and eliminate whatever they had had in the past. That's entirely possible. But I think with the world of politics, economics and modern society, that is unlikely to happen. A well-established civilization would have its own set of traditions and strategies.

VS: So do you see a kind of indigenous Chinese Social Science emerging?

WGW: Yes, I think that's what they are talking about.

VS: Do you see any evidence of it? What is your assessment? Do you think there is a genuine attempt at constructing this?

WGW: I think there are attempts but it's still early days. Because I think they haven't fully digested what they have learnt, much of the talk is still in the realm of dreams and ambitions. The Chinese are learning the techniques well. But the assumptions underlying the enquiries of social scientists in, say, America, about the way society is or should be organized, how their people generalize their wants and desires, and how prevailing social operations enable people to achieve what they want, these are based on certain ways of doing things that are common in the West, and highly developed and particularised. After the research is done, you come up with certain

results, and possibly new theories. But the kind of society from which you drew those results may never have existed in China. So when you bring the methodology to use on a different society, your results may not meet expectations. What do you do then? Do you force the results to conform by making adjustments, tweaking a little here and there so that you can come up with the right conclusions, and also so that your social scientist professors can say, “Oh, good, it works”? Then you’re either deceiving your professors or you’re deceiving yourself.

Something like that is happening and it is hard to accept the benefits of such research. Others, however, are saying no. They try to use the same or similar techniques taken from the West but ask different questions pertinent to a different cultural framework. That is also happening but there is still uncertainty about the validity of their results because the researchers are themselves not confident of what they are doing without explicit approval of their counterparts abroad. Because the assumptions of a particular methodology, when, where and how the methodology was perfected, can be overwhelming, scholars can’t make it work successfully in areas where the underlying premises are different and the questions are worded in a way which is appropriate in one context, but not appropriate in another. The Chinese have been trying very hard with social surveys, for example. They’ve had at least two decades of experimenting with different kinds of survey methods. Some results are interesting, but no one seems sure they are sound for new theoretical works to emerge because the methodology is derived from different sets of circumstances somewhere else.

VS: One of the problems that have been noted in Social Science settings outside of Europe and North America is that there has been an unthinking imitation of Western knowledge – including theories and methodologies, and as you say, these don’t fit the Asian context. So there is this movement to indigenize the Social Sciences. And I was just wondering if in the Chinese case there is consciousness of this?

WGW: Oh they definitely are conscious of it. They are in some ways even more conscious about this than scholars in Southeast Asia because they had gone through this strong Marxist phase. Because of that, they had done Marxist theory and method almost to death and now acknowledge that much of it didn’t work. So some of them are more wary now and are learning from their mistakes. If all that “scientific” method didn’t work, the new theories and methodologies from the United States may also not be adequately domesticated to work in China. So the best social scientists are at least more sensitive to that possibility. There is now a double reluctance, a reluctance that is rooted in their own traditions that makes them more cautious, and the extra reluctance because they have done it once before and then found themselves to be utterly confused by it all. So now that they’ve come back to look to the West, they would like to avoid applying methodologies that might not work. They do not want to look foolish again and are not happy with some of the younger scholars who go all out to please their American professors and follow exactly what they are taught to do. Others, of course, are concerned to make their careers quickly, and some hope to stay in the United States where they would have to conform to the prevailing standards. But if these scholars go back to China, they know that their contemporaries in China don’t accept simple applications of what they had learnt abroad. So they have to adapt and try to modify what they learnt, or turn around to say, “I cannot do the work in China and am going back to work in America”. That’s the tension that I see. And it’ll be like that for quite a while until some genius comes along. You’ll need someone like another Marx or Weber, but homegrown in China. India already has produced some social scientists who have done very well. But the Chinese are not quite there yet because they haven’t been exposed to Western social science for as long as the Indians have. Some Indians have had five or six generations of people who’ve been directly absorbing, regurgitating,

transforming and internalizing what they have learnt, and then coming up with their own set of theories. China hasn't had that time. Or rather the Chinese did it by following a path that led them astray; they have now doubled back and, in many ways, are starting all over again.

VS: You've anticipated my next question which is about, okay, well, this is supposed to be the Asian century, with the rise of India and China as economic powers. So do you think this might be the Asian century in terms of intellectual, academic power, whether Chinese, Indian or others?

WGW: Anything is possible. I mean, a perfect example of someone who's managed to do that is Indian; he is Amartya Sen. China could one day produce somebody of that calibre, but it will take a while; they are not ready for that yet. In the case of India, I mean, I've talked to Amartya, and he talks about his grandfather, his father and the generations of scholars in Bengal! He talks of his grandfather's mixing of great classical knowledge with the understanding of Western philosophy, his father's knowledge of the Sanskrit texts that was imparted to Amartya himself. All that time, there was learning about Western values, but always with a clear understanding as to where it has a place and where it does not. So just to hear Amartya explaining about the three generations and the dimensions of scholarship underlying it all, that's really something!

VS: Right. Do you see comparable figures in the Chinese context?

WGW: It's much too early. I don't see anybody like that now. But then I can't say anyone saw someone like Amartya Sen emerging fifty years ago. Tagore was a brilliant example two generations earlier. He was like a flash of lightning. He had no real successors like him, and that was in the field of literature and not the Social Sciences. I don't know what he had to say about the Social Sciences. My friends tell me his poetry is wonderful in Bengali but when he translated his poems, they don't read nearly as well. I've only read some of them in English and have not found them memorable. So even with Tagore, his successes had no bearing on breakthroughs in the social sciences for several decades because the social scientists were not yet ready. It does not have to take that long in China and may happen sooner than that, who knows? After all, developments are faster now. The access to knowledge is much better now, with cyberspace, computers, google and everything, there is just so much more exposure to new data and ideas. It may shorten the time needed for someone to come forth in China. But I expect that it won't be easy.

VS: Do you think the goal of constructing an indigenous social science is a worthwhile pursuit?

WGW: I am reminded of an analogy from American history. The American Revolution has been greatly admired – it was anti-colonial, got rid of the British, established the first new nation, and so on. The American Declaration of Independence, drawing from 18th century enlightenment ideals, talks about the 'pursuit of happiness'. I am fascinated by this and believe that the American leaders at the time secretly knew that you could not catch happiness by simply pursuing it. Those who knew that were okay. Those who did not know that are likely in the end to make themselves unhappy. If you run after something rather unpredictable and intangible, you would never catch it. But if you do your best and make progress, you may actually find it one day. As for indigenous social science as an intellectual goal, why not? Go for it, but don't run after it as if it is something real that you can catch. My sense is that if you don't run too hard after it you may actually find it.

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

The Age of New Paradigms^H

Wang Gungwu

East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore (eaiwgn@nus.edu.sg)

The theme of paradigm shift is of great interest to scholars all over Asia. I am happy to see that the organizers have chosen this theme. I am reminded that the idea of paradigm as used by Thomas Kuhn is now some 50 years old. Since then, there have been numerous claims that paradigm shifts have taken place. It may not be too much of an exaggeration to say that new paradigms have been proposed regularly ever since then, not least in the social sciences disciplines. There is now something of an industry to check the validity of social science paradigms. Forgive me if I confess that I am skeptical of many of such claims. But it would be true to say that the possibility of finding a new paradigm has driven many scholars to come up with important and sometimes brilliant insights in numerous fields of study. Certainly the idea of a paradigm shift has been a major research tool in advancing scholarship.

I shall not argue about whether the paradigm shifts that have been suggested are justified or not. I do not define paradigms very strictly myself. As long as a new pattern or model is accepted as being valuable for research purposes, I would be prepared to take that as paradigmatic. What I shall try to do here is to place the idea of new paradigms in a longer-term perspective. This seems to me to be appropriate here given the historical origins of IAHA.

When Thomas Kuhn convinced us of the paradigm shift following the scientific revolution in Europe, we were struck by the logic and beauty of his presentation. He identified what such a transformation in world-views meant for the scholarly world and showed how we could connect and explain a variety of revolutionary changes that had occurred. Underlying these changes was the idea of universality as something that we could find in the past and also expect to find in the future. Thus, looking back, we might ask, was there a specific paradigm before the one that Thomas Kuhn had identified? If there was, what was it, and how long did that last? And, looking forwards, we might also ask, could a new paradigm shift be permanent? If not, could a shift lead back or revert to an older one, or be replaced by another new paradigm?

In the context of the theme of this conference, what does a paradigm shift in Asia mean? Is it truly new or something more like a reversion to an earlier paradigm and represents some kind of pendulum swing? Also, as one might well ask, is this something we in Asia discovered for ourselves or, as often happens these days, was it pointed out to us by scholars working in the West? I shall explore these questions and also offer some reflections on the age of paradigms in Asia and elsewhere, asking historical questions like, how old did the replaced paradigms get before they were replaced? In other words, how long did paradigms survive, and how long can any paradigm survive today in a world that seems to be changing so rapidly? This would also lead me to distinguish between

^H This paper was delivered at an IAHA conference in Taiwan in 2004 and appeared in the *Yatai yanjiu luntan* (Asia-Pacific Forum), Taiwan.

different kinds of paradigms, for example, the old and the new and the perennial. Many of the conference papers here will be examining this vast subject in all sorts of different ways. I merely offer to kick off with a few questions and invite you to put the issue of paradigm shifts in Asia in a historical context.

Let me begin with Kuhn's paradigm and ask what kind of paradigm was there before the scientific revolution. I am not even sure that there was any one paradigm that could be easily identified. But, since Kuhn's new paradigm has gained universal acceptance, we might argue that what it replaced had also been universal in some way. At least it would have had common features around the world that might be recognisable. Because the new paradigm was linked to the scientific revolution, we could assume that the replaced paradigm was "not scientific". Furthermore, there would have been regional differences around the world, and obviously different "unscientific" ways in various contemporary civilizations that sometimes helped to advance knowledge.

For example, the state of "non-scientific" thinking in the 16th and 17th centuries in Western Europe was distinct from that prevailing in Asia. On the eve of the scientific revolution in Europe, when Tycho Brahe and then Galileo and Kepler were re-charting the skies against received views of the Catholic world, Muslim mathematicians and astronomers were quiescent in the Middle East. But some were still active alongside those in India and China. As for Chinese astronomers, they were stubbornly pragmatic and shied away from new ideas and methodologies. When the Confucian mandarins encountered the new "scientific" ideas of Matteo Ricci in the late 16th century, and then those of his Jesuit colleagues like Giulo Aleni, Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest during the next hundred years, they consistently rejected what did not conform with their ideas. These mandarins demonstrated a range of "unscientific" thinking that had little in common with that found in India and the Middle East. Nevertheless, we could argue that each kind of resistance to radical re-thinking was part of a broader "non-scientific" paradigm that depended on religious backgrounds and other kinds of traditional faiths. Today we think the Chinese mandarins were so backward not to have appreciated the progressive ideas and institutions that the Jesuits had brought. In fact, we may have gone too far the other way, so much so that we are likely now to take seriously and sometimes uncritically any new paradigm that came out of an European or American university.

But there were other paradigms at work in the 17th century. In various ways, people in Asia at the time would place their faith in some force or superior Being that determined the course of their lives. Such faith demanded that any quest for knowledge should obey given values or laws. Effective ways to acquire new knowledge and advance the cause of learning were already there. For most people, there was profound meaning in their acts of faith as well as the rituals and habits that grew around these acts. Inspired by these faiths, people could still be inventive and creative in the acquisition of new knowledge, and society could advance from simple to complex, rural to urban, even from barbarism to the rise of civilisation. Each of these historical stages could be said to have been the product of its own paradigm.

But what precisely were the paradigms before the scientific revolution of the 17th century in Europe? Had there been earlier paradigm shifts and, if there were, what was the nature of such shifts in the past? Since the people then did not have the concept, I am hesitant to apply the word paradigm retrospectively. But if we find similar ingredients in the various ways they studied their societies, why not? If we go far back enough, what about the way knowledge was used by hunter-gatherers to re-learn and acquire new knowledge needed to establish agrarian economies? Was there not a paradigm shift there? After that, when people learnt to live in towns and cities, they would also have required another paradigm shift. One can imagine totally new ways of thinking replacing

the older ways. There would then follow new generations of people who would examine their lives more self-consciously with even more different sets of premises. Of course, the different mix of rural and urban environments called for greater varieties of knowledge seeking. The particular mix that produced the scientific revolution in Europe was unique and no other mix of ideas and institutions had been able to lead to that particular phenomenon. I have learnt to welcome new paradigm shifts. But could future paradigm shifts turn backwards? Could older paradigms be revived?

Kuhn's paradigm shift did imply that it marked a total negation of previous paradigms and gave the impression that it is a path of no return. I do not know if he had intended it to be so absolute. Of course, the nature of the scientific paradigm itself led to revolutionary methods that seem to have overturned everything. On the other hand, we know that the new paradigm that Kuhn identified had evolved from the cruder methods that had been tried in earlier times. What happened in the 17th century were the systematic use of improved methods and the crystallization of the laws and principles that could be derived from them. As these accumulated, they confirmed the idea of progress and reinforced hopes of an ever better world. But, at its base, the paradigm was more modest. The seeming methodological discontinuity was not a total break with the past but more an enrichment and enhancement of the values and ideas that had long been known.

Nevertheless, the impact of the new paradigm has been profound. We in Asia are now all prepared for more paradigm shifts to come. We look out for them in ways our ancestors had never done, notably in our centres of higher learning and through our scholarly journals. So much so that some years ago I identified the influence of paradigm shifts on the research and teaching in our universities and found the following contrast in our search for paradigm shifts. This is what I said,

“In universities in Western Europe, North America and Australasia, paradigm shifts come more from academic and intellectual activity, or cerebral responses to social and cultural changes over time, taking in the larger picture in the context of universal science and progress, and of modern civilisation, as the main driving force in history.

“In Asia, especially in the newer nations over the past half century, paradigm shifts are more situational, much more influenced by contemporary political and economic developments. Thus, we might distinguish between responses to academic shifts emerging from the major scholarly centres in the West and those responses to situational changes (which sometimes produce paradigm shifts) that have been experienced in Asia itself.”

I shall not examine whether the paradigm shift in Asia referred to here as the theme of this conference is a knowledge-driven shift or a situational one. I consider it self-evident that, with the economic rise of Japan and then East Asia, and now of India and Southeast Asia, we are more ready to accept suggestions of paradigm shift in our research that reflect that situational change. I see nothing wrong with situational responses that could produce new paradigms. The change in Asia has occurred at two levels. More people now believe that power has really shifted from the kind of colonial and imperial domination by the West to one where Asian entities can more or less determine their own fates. Therefore, there are more options for Asians to map out their own paths to progress. This perspective had begun early with K.M. Panikkar's *Asia and Western Dominance* (1954) that pointed to the end of Western dominance and Jan Romein's *The Asian Century*, which he wrote in 1956. Looking back, both judgments were premature, but clearly both authors were groping for some kind of paradigm shift.

Actually Kuhn first wrote on the structure of scientific revolutions about the same time in 1955, but his work was not known to most of us until Chicago published his book seven years later, in 1962.

At another level, some scholars in the West had themselves become discontented with the idea of Western civilisational dominance. This led to the post-modern discourse that seems to have been knowledge-driven. It had come from a re-discovery of “non-Western” history and culture, or a reaction against the positivism of the Enlightenment project, something that had begun with artists and writers like Ezra Pound and gained wide recognition with Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation in the 1950s. Yet another source was the systematic reappraisal of facts and interpretations that had previously confirmed the supremacy of “Western-modern” values. This included the powerful demonstration of imperial European construction of an Oriental past by Edward Said and the enthusiastic following that he inspired. More recently, we have seen many books like Andre Gunder Frank’s *Re-Orient* and John Hobson’s *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*. And there was the drive for change within Asia itself, most notably the turn to Islam and religious authenticity. Many other communities were also engaged in the return to conservative values, wherever there was felt the need to fill the moral and spiritual vacuum in a triumphant capitalism.

Whatever the reason for the knowledge-driven shifts, it supported the emerging reality today, one of Asians recovering their self-confidence. That reality helped to confirm the assertion of paradigm shifts. It has led us to be receptive of some shifts that we now more or less take for granted. Let me focus on a few examples that have been influential in Asia. I have chosen four that are well known and can be used to support what I have said above. The four have also been chosen to illustrate different kinds of paradigm shifts, what call the recurrent, the continuous, the contested and the cumulative. An example of the recurrent paradigm shift would be “Culture Matters”, something that has found a new lease of life following the powerful image of “the clash of civilisations”. The second example, of the continuous shift, are the many manifestations of the “Core/Centre and Periphery” paradigm. The third example is more controversial. I have chosen the “Party Politics” phenomenon often linked with the advent of democracy. This would be an example of the contested paradigm shift. Finally, the fourth example is that of “International Systems” which I call a cumulative paradigm, something akin to Kuhn’s original paradigm, with the shifts being cumulative over centuries. I have chosen these examples to show that, in this age of paradigms, it would be useful to have a typology of paradigms. I shall now explain the differences among the four and why I think marking these differences could be useful.

Culture Matters

Let me begin with the recurrent paradigm. It probably surprised people in Asia that there should be a book entitled *Culture Matters: how values shape human progress* (2000) [edited by Samuel Huntington and Lawrence Harrison]. The title invokes the word “culture”, and the idea that culture is important seems to be self-evident everywhere in Asia. At least, I am not aware of anyone in Asia who would disagree with that general statement. The editors of the book, however, are more focused, and take on the argument about the place of culture in the social sciences. This is an issue that has been debated for several decades and was most recently stimulated by Huntington’s own essay on “The Clash of Civilisations”. Not surprisingly, that essay has attracted attention all over Asia.

We are all familiar with the uses of the scientific model to set aside matters pertaining to anything linked with “culture” because they are not quantifiable and often unreliable. This was essential for certain kinds of experiments and calculations. But many

scientists also recognise the limits of the technical and narrow approach, limits which remind us of those what used to encumber the traditional methods of the classicists, philosophers, rhetoricians, philologists, theologians, and historians in the past. Those scholars were mindful of the cultural baggage they carried into their work. Many of them would agree that their methods had reached the point of when they found breakthroughs in knowledge increasingly difficult. Hence the strong urge in the social sciences to break out of the old paradigms.

Why do we need a book to affirm that “culture matters” now? Attacks on the unscientific use of culture in social studies go back a long time, and dates back at least to the rise of fields like economics and sociology at the beginning of the 19th century. Karl Marx was probably the most powerful proponent of what was to be called “scientific socialism” in a positivist era. I was much influenced by Marx but, at the same time, I was restrained by the cultural arguments in R.H. Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Tawney first developed this in 1922 and confirmed what Max Weber had argued some twenty years earlier in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [only translated into English in 1930]. Soon after that, I was further struck by Weber’s famous essay on Confucianism and Taoism, and excited by the explanatory power of ideas and cultural values. Since then, despite my faith in the scientific revolution and the brilliance of Kuhn’s paradigm, I have never been able to shake off the conviction that culture has mattered all along, and that attempts to leave it out have not been convincing. Thus I was surprised by the intolerance shown to historical and cultural explanations among many social scientists since the 1980s. New paradigms that sought to replace the value of history and culture have been favoured. This has led many to turn away from the reality of cultural factors in human behaviour, whether in war and peace or in the management of complex organisations. I am convinced that the pressure of that reality will counteract this trend. The age of the culture-less social science, for better or worse, may not last all that long. Of course, there had always been periods of doubt about the explanatory power of the idea of culture. But cultural elements have continued to demand attention. There may therefore never be real paradigm shifts where culture is concerned. Hence this is an example of the recurrent paradigm.

Core and Periphery

The next example of “core and periphery” I have called a continuous paradigm. It has always had wide appeal in Asia. The paradigm was given its fullest expression by Immanuel Wallerstein, notably in his world-systems theory. In familiar dialectical terms, he has raised the core-periphery paradigm to the level of a global phenomenon, and the tension it represents has now become part of the anti-globalisation agenda. In fact, this paradigm has an ancient pedigree and has always been so useful that it has been extensively applied to the widest possible range of human, technical and natural phenomena. In Asia, the paradigm shift today could be couched in terms of the rise of new Asian regional cores to which may be attached some realigned peripheries. For example, we identify a core in the Japanese economy since the 1960s to which the Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs) were the periphery. One could predict that China’s dynamic shift to capitalistic ways since the 1980s might ultimately produce a new core for Asia. In both cases, the peripheries would include parts of Southeast Asia and beyond.

Such changes may be seen as simply a stage of development and does not prove that any paradigm shift has occurred. The key question is, how long do these core-periphery relationships last? The paradigm has had many precedents and may therefore be called a continuous paradigm that has taken different forms and been given different names. At the risk of sounding contradictory in terms, I would suggest that the pattern is a perennial one. Scholars have been playing with similar ideas from ancient times. For

example, among its different names, there have been comparable pairings made in religious discourse between the head and heart of a great faith and the outer limbs of the faithful. Similarly, the images of court and country, and even the rulers and the rule, and there are analogies that separated the civilised from the barbarous, and the centre from the local. In all these relationships, the underlying principle was hierarchical and the superiority of the core and the power relationships that were projected were never questioned. However, there is something that distinguishes the modern core and periphery paradigm from the others, and that is the high degree of flexibility implied in modern usage. At any one time, the core not only bore an interdependent relationship to the periphery but, as Wallerstein suggests and can be variously demonstrated, the core could also change and move, and in time the periphery could even become a new core to which the former core would become dependent.

Thus the continuous paradigm where the continuity has helped knowledge-seekers from the earliest times to frame their studies. It is something that could be adapted for different purposes to explain different power and cultural relationships. Its use today, in association with analytical methods, has demonstrated the impermanence of such relationships. We now have a better understanding of the core-periphery patterns throughout history and can identify its evolution under different geographical and economic conditions. And, in so far as it could be modified to become an open system of core-periphery interchanges, we can say that the paradigm is continuous. There is really no new paradigm, only a series of shifts in meaning in response to changing contexts. Hence there is no difficulty for Asians to say that we have had this paradigm all along and a new shift from any periphery to an Asian core is not at all surprising.

Party politics

My third example is of a contested paradigm. This is drawn from the theory that party politics is inevitable as we push towards democratic governance. I refer in particular to the writings that have followed Maurice Duverger's famous study of political parties. As he shows, during the past two centuries, party politics has come to dominate all varieties of political activity. In so far as this is the backbone of democratic organization, something alien to traditional Asia, this would seem to qualify as a totally new paradigm shift for Asia. That is, there was a paradigmatic shift when courtiers and mandarins gave way to political professionals who organised themselves through political parties in order to control popular or democratic systems. Certainly the idea that kings and other rulers were legitimate by the will of God or Heaven has been superceded. But in what way do their successors rule by the wish of the people (however that is determined) is far from uniform. On the surface, a paradigm shift has occurred, at least, in theory and in the political rhetoric used today. Even in practice, we have seen the growth of the phenomenon of party politics everywhere. However, what is important is the assumption that party politics evolved when more than one party was needed to compete for the right to rule. Maurice Duverger considers the role of parties mostly in nations that already have democratic systems. He does not consider parties that have to function where a nation does not yet exist. Nor does he deal with post-colonial states that experienced democracy only after the colonial officials had left.

I would like to use examples from Southeast Asia after de-colonisation. We have at least three kinds of countries. The first distrusted political parties and no real parties were allowed to be active. Here the governments believed that they were above parties. Thus they only permitted or encouraged "royal" parties, as for a while in Thailand and Brunei, or the military-dominated ones as in Myanmar and, from about 1965 to 1998, in Indonesia. And then, there are the single party countries, for example, where a revolutionary communist party was victorious, as in Vietnam and Laos and almost so in

Cambodia. Where a single party is enough, its politics could not qualify as party politics. Finally, there are countries like the Philippines, Thailand for the past two decades, Malaysia and Singapore (and now also in Indonesia and the new Cambodia) where some desire for democracy has survived, although variously interpreted by each of the parties concerned. In such cases, there has been room for one, two or more parties, including alliances of a number of parties.

The presence of three such different examples in a single region like Southeast Asia is intriguing, especially when they seem to tolerate one another enough to seek to work in harmony and to maximise their common interests in ASEAN. It is also interesting that ASEAN members are only pushing Myanmar to be more democratic but not Vietnam or Laos. Is this because Myanmar has no political parties and does not believe in having them? As long as there is one modern party (as with the Communist parties of Vietnam and Laos), and the party affirms that other parties may be allowed, would that meet the paradigm norm? What is fascinating is how quickly various countries have accepted the idea that it is the existence of the political party that marks the key paradigm shift. Power has to be organised, if not shared, through something called the party. Once it was established that a party is in control, the paradigm has been fulfilled. But how real is the shift in paradigms? If the power elites agree that one party is enough, or as long as they have something called a party, does that mean that a shift has occurred? There is danger here that we are playing with words, and that this will do little to help the search for knowledge. I therefore suggest that we are really dealing with an incomplete or contested paradigm, something that everyone would claim to have but where definitions of what the key concept of party really means cannot be agreed upon. Where there are such disagreements, how can we be sure that we have a paradigm shift?

International Systems

My fourth example turns to the prevailing international system, one based on the idea of equal sovereign states in a United Nations Organisation. This is on the surface quite straightforward. In principle, it has gained the respect of most Asian national leaders. I have described this shift as a cumulative one that is based on changing distributions of power. Let me explain why. By international systems, I refer to the system of international rules (or, as some would prefer to call them, laws) that was the product of many efforts by European powers from the Congress of Vienna to the League of Nations. The final product after the Second World War was the United Nations, together with the linked institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and all the international organisations that have been established since. Under-girding these efforts was developed a body of theory that now guides all thinking and research about the future of war and peace in the world. What is remarkable is that, in less than half a century, this body of theory has become the foundation of all features of globalisation that we experience today.

The significant point to make is that these efforts by the European powers did finally produce what was a paradigm shift, that is, moving us from a state of continuous conflict (if not anarchy) to a rule-based condition. However reluctantly countries were led to accept the new set of rules, the deadly wars of the 20th century (1914-1918 and 1939-1945 in particular) made it compelling for them to transform themselves into determined peace-seeking nations. Thus the victors of 1945 devised the rules to signify the advent of a new paradigm. And the trebling of new nations that joined the UN after the decolonisation processes of the 1950s quickly confirmed the efficacy of that change. The shift of the paradigm was delayed if not frozen by the nuclear rivalry of forty years of the Cold War (1950 to 1990). The relentless struggle for power during this period, through proxies when not dealt with directly by the superpowers themselves, left little

room to test the efficacy of the paradigm. When the Cold War ended, there was great relief that “the end of history” (as propounded by Francis Fukuyama) was here. At last, the paradigm of a ruled-based world order could be given a chance to show its explanatory power.

So far, this has not happened, although there is no shortage of scholars who would say that this has been an obvious case of a paradigm shift. Perhaps this seems to be so because it is not old enough, that is, if we take it that the shift did not really occur until the 1990s. On the other hand, if we consider the two centuries of effort and the many tragedies that resulted from earlier failures, perhaps the shift simply has not been completed. It may be argued that the ideals behind the systems, with organisations that would check the strong and support the weak, have been difficult to realise. The more cynical would conclude that the systems were, in the first place, set up to enable the strong to consolidate a status quo that would keep them in power indefinitely. In short, the rules drawn up could not be fully enforced and the key international laws were largely ineffective or often contradictory. Much more work has yet to be done. In both arguments, it would seem that we need more time and we need to try harder to bring about the paradigm shift that would enable us to examine and test the system.

Let me underline the fact that everything in the last sixty years point to a paradigm shift in thinking and explaining international events. The scholars of international relations theory have been right to recognise that the ingredients are there to draw roadmaps for a respected international system. Indeed they have opened up many vistas to such a system. But there are intractable problems here that suggest that this paradigm shift is totally subject to the actual distribution of power at any one time. That power distribution can, of course, be corrected through economic or political means without the use of force. But it is far from agreed who should have the right to act where there is an obvious maldistribution of power. Nor is it clear who would have the capacity and will to act beyond the given rules and laws. So the paradigm is still an ongoing exercise that is building upon at least two centuries of history. The experience and results so far have been cumulatively leading to a broader understanding and wider acceptance of the need to succeed here if we want a more peaceful world. This accumulation raises our hopes for a decisive shift, but I for one am not confident that the desired paradigm shift has yet occurred.

The survey of the four examples of paradigm shifts reminds us that the age of paradigms that we live in today encourages us to search for more. But it also suggests that not all paradigms are necessarily what they seem and certainly not all of them are equal. I have shown that there are some that really date back a long time and have been useful concepts off and on and in various forms in different parts of the world. Others, however, are new and still very young and still have to be widely accepted. The older ones, whether we call them recurrent or continuous, have happened through different mindsets, even using different names for similar qualities. Yet others seem quite incomplete. They are either still somewhat indeterminate and are therefore much contested or they have accumulated a lot of historical and theoretical mileage without having arrived at a uniformly usable condition.

I am sensitive to the fact that scholarship in the 21st century needs to function in an age of paradigms. The theme of this conference has highlighted the paradigm shifts in Asia, especially through comparisons of the three regions of East, South and Southeast Asia. My remarks here cannot encompass all the regions nor raise all the issues that need attention. They are meant to point to the larger phenomenon of moving from the particular to the universal that many of the paradigms imply. If we are serious about these paradigms, however, we would have to recognise that they all need some test of

universality across the board. The conference theme has emphasized the comparisons across the Asian continent. I have used this lecture to draw special attention to the need to recognise that any test of universality also requires us to exercise the test of time. We may never know the age of any paradigm, nor when exactly a shift has occurred. But it would be a mistake to assume that paradigms and the shifts they bring are all new.

International Sociological Association

e-bulletin

Teaching Visual Ethnography in Singapore: The Potentials of Digital Video for Research in the Social Sciences

Roxana Waterson

National University of Singapore

socroxan@nus.edu.sg

*Roxana Waterson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, where she has been teaching since 1987. She did her Ph. D. in Social Anthropology at New Hall, Cambridge (1981), and has done fieldwork with the Sa'dan Toraja people of Sulawesi (Indonesia) since 1978. Her publications include *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in Southeast Asia* (3rd Edn, Thames & Hudson, 1997); *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience* (Singapore/Athens, Ohio: Singapore University Press/Ohio University Press, 2007); and 'Trajectories of Memory: Documentary Film and the Transmission of Testimony', *History and Anthropology* 18/1:51-73 (March 2007). She has been teaching critical and practical courses on visual ethnography since 2002. Her other current interests include social memory, life history and childhoods.*

“A democratic civilisation”, writes Umberto Eco, “will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection - not an invitation to hypnosis.” Yet how often, even in today’s image-saturated world, are students taught how to look at images critically? This is still all too rare. At the same time, the rapidity of advances in digital technology have altered the balance of power in the production of images, opening up endless, newly affordable possibilities for people to create and disseminate their own images, even to become their own photojournalists and filmmakers. U.S. politicians, beginning to campaign for the next elections, flock to YouTube to get their messages across, blogging has become a new political as much as personal phenomenon, and since 2005 the “Pocket Film Festival”, first held in Paris, has been showcasing films shot entirely on mobile phones. In this rapidly changing world of new image technology, the potentials for incorporating visual skills and visual analysis into our university courses are wide open. Students respond with great enthusiasm to such initiatives, which move beyond text to include new ways of thinking and hands-on learning. At the same time they provide a fresh point of view from which to critique the texts which still form the basis of the majority of university courses, since they challenge us to think more critically about what is involved in *any* form of representation. As such, learning to use visual media can have intellectual results that carry over into other courses and into how one thinks about broader theoretical issues in one’s chosen discipline, whether it be the social sciences, literature or something else. Most especially, learning to make one’s own documentary film records must involve acting on a proper understanding of ethical responsibility to one’s subjects. Trying it for themselves gives students first hand experience of what this means in practice, and this brings with it a

deeper awareness of the dialogical and intersubjective nature of the research process itself.

Expanding a place for the visual in the social sciences

The Department of Sociology at NUS has from its inception been a joint department of sociology and anthropology. Our courses offer students the benefits of varied perspectives from both of these intimately related disciplines. Since understanding what is happening in a globalised world requires more and more globalised kinds of explanation and theory, it is logical for the disciplines to draw ever closer together and to share their methodologies. To date, filmmakers in the ethnographic genre seem to have had a closer relation with anthropology than sociology, though I see no particular reason why that should have been so. Some practitioners are anthropologists who have received film training; others are independent filmmakers who to different degrees have had a relationship with academic anthropology - a relationship that has regrettably not been without tension. And there are also filmmakers who have had no particular link with academic anthropology at all, but whose work has startling qualities of documentary immediacy and intimacy, offering the viewer a wealth of sociological insights.¹ These practitioners have filmed in all manner of settings, both urban and rural, industrialised and non-industrialised, rich and poor, in developed and developing countries. But as Henley (2000) has observed, in spite of its obvious potentials as a medium for the depiction of social life and interactions, film has for decades remained marginalised within the discipline of anthropology. This has been partly because of the technical difficulties and expensiveness of the medium, and partly because most anthropologists, lacking a suitable training in analysing images, have been too ready to pass judgement on films as if they were texts. By the criteria they were accustomed to looking for in the latter, such as the density of contextualising information or the abstraction of analysis, ethnographic films were bound to be found wanting. Thus it was easy to dismiss them as not fully qualifying as ethnographic “knowledge”; and it would appear that the impact of film in most sociology departments has been even less. The failure to take film seriously as a medium, with its own ways of producing meaning, meant that even the most renowned ethnographic filmmakers like David and Judith MacDougall have had to plead over and over again for audiences trained in the social sciences to come to a better understanding of the differences between cinema and the written word (MacDougall 1978, 1995, 2006; Barbash and Taylor 1996).

But the theoretical and methodological concerns of anthropology itself have shifted dramatically in the past two decades of debate toward a more searching self-reflexivity; a recognition of the essential intersubjectivity of the ethnographic enterprise; and an acceptance of the incompleteness of *any* account of a social setting, which of necessity can be only a partial fragment. In terms of subject matter, there is a greater concern in current research with the body, experience, emotions, and the performative dimensions of much social interaction. All of this has helped anthropology as a whole to catch up, as it were, with a problematique that filmmakers had already had to address long ago. Thus a greater appreciation becomes possible of what it is that film *can* reasonably be expected to deliver - and perhaps deliver better than text. Quite apart from film's obvious potential to capture the performative dimensions of social activity, what is for me

¹ Kim Longinotto is an excellent example of such a filmmaker. She has filmed in a wide range of social settings in the U.K., Japan, Iran and a number of African countries, only occasionally in conjunction with an anthropologist. She prefers to work with an all-female crew of no more than three people, and favours as subjects women who are striving to make a liveable life for themselves in the face of social constraints; her films are highly effective stimulants to discussion of issues relating to gender and the body.

significant is the empathic mode of comprehension that it makes possible. Because it preserves the nonverbal aspects of communication in a way that text cannot, it creates for the viewer the possibility of arriving at an understanding of some social context or human predicament that in a text can easily elude us. Text is a better format in which to deliver dense statistical or historical information, or to present abstract analysis of social structures. But this still leaves the question of experience – what is it *like* to live within such a social structure or at such a historical conjuncture – and to live it as a person of this or that gender, generation, ethnic, class or other position? As the “experiential turn” in the social sciences takes hold, the potentials of film as a medium can be more easily grasped.

If anthropology’s “crisis of representation” has thus offered the possibility of a belated reconciliation with film, the advent of digital video technology simultaneously closed another gap, in making video cameras and editing suites vastly more affordable and easy to use. Where for decades, those in the social sciences who actually received film training remained a tiny “tribe within a tribe”, now it is feasible to teach much larger numbers of students the basic skills of filmmaking and editing. Computer softwares have made editing suites about ten times cheaper than the traditional linear equipment. Where once the equipment for a filmmaking expedition might have amounted to two or three hundred kilos, posing almost insuperable logistical problems in travel to remote locations (as James Fox has recalled of his trips to Eastern Indonesia with filmmaker Tim Asch in the 1970s), today it is perfectly feasible to shoot videos single-handedly and to be able to carry all your equipment in a single shoulder bag. There is no longer any reason why the video camera should not become as much an accepted part of the fieldworker’s equipment as the more traditional notebooks and camera. Anyone who wants to can easily learn enough to shoot footage in the field as a form of note-taking, even if not every researcher will decide to make a film as a finished product. One can even play back the footage immediately to one’s participants. All this brings us dramatically closer to achieving the goal, long ago outlined by Jean Rouch (2003 [1973]), of a more truly “shared anthropology”.^J

Another recent trend has been a broadening of the conceptualisation of “visual ethnography” to include a wide range of ways of incorporating photography, film, video and electronic media into one’s research, either as part of the method or as the site of investigation itself (Banks and Morphy 1997; Prosser 1998; Ruby 2000; Banks 2001; Pink 2006, 2007). Within anthropology there is also an increasing interest in indigenous media production, and a recognition of indigenous media and ethnographic film as ‘different but related projects’ (Ginsburg 1999). There are overlaps here with approaches to the visual in other academic disciplines. Within cinema studies, for instance, there has been a renewed interest in the study of documentary film as a genre and the increasingly vexed question of representation of the ‘real’, as fiction and documentary genres seem more and more to flow into each other in many contemporary works (Gaines and Renov 1999). “Cultural studies” has also formed as a rapidly expanding disciplinary field with its own strong interest in theorising the power of images in media-saturated late capitalist cultures (Mirzoeff 1999; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Hall, Stimson and Becker 2005). There is a large overlap here with departments of art history as much as sociology, and the books produced often focus on art and design, photography, advertising images and

^J Although digital video would appear to have brought within reach Rouch’s earlier dream of a technology flexible and light enough to allow the filmmaker to work single-handed (something he had actively sought in his experimentation with technological developments in the 1960s), strangely, toward the end of his life he reportedly stated a dislike of digital video. In this he contrasted in a marked manner with his equally renowned contemporary, Richard Leacock, who in his eighties has embraced digital video with great enthusiasm (Michael Eaton, personal communication).

fashion (Barnard 2001; Dikovitskaya 2001). Visual sociology is in itself a quite well-defined field, but one which seems to have remained even more marginal to the discipline as a whole than is the case with anthropology; to date, most visual sociologists seem to have concentrated on photography, or the analysis of images, rather than on filmmaking as a potential research method. One recent example (Emmison and Smith 2000) interprets “the visual” predominantly in terms of observation as a research method; there is limited discussion of photography, but no mention of film, video or the internet. Pole (2004) concentrates mainly on the uses of photography as a research method, but includes two chapters about video. A more synthetic approach was recently taken by an Open University seminar designed to bring together visual researchers from a range of fields (anthropology, sociology, geography, education, as well as photographers, artists, writers and filmmakers), resulting in the publication of the impressive four-volume *Visual Research Methods* (Hamilton 2006). This reminds us that the field is still emergent. Disciplinary boundaries, in any case, are not particularly relevant to filmmakers, for there is really no limit to the range of ethnographic locations that might make interesting subjects to film.

All of this might lead us to conclude that in sociology especially, the potentials of the visual have not yet been fully appreciated.^K However, the new technical possibilities make this a special moment to consider fresh developments in how we can incorporate visual media into our work. What a practical course in the uses of video as a research tool can offer is the chance to change our own practice, to create our own images as an active part of the research process, rather than simply analysing the images already “out there”, produced by others in the consumer culture. It obliges us to think seriously about the content of a film, as a depiction of social life or interactions. As an outgrowth of that documentary style that has been called “observational realism”, ethnographic films at their best offer that elusive “feeling of being there” - not in fact easily achieved from a technical point of view - and a sense of encounter, such that viewers feel as if they have indeed come to know the participants, if only vicariously. The medium thus has a special potential to cross cultural boundaries, expanding for us those realms of “shareable experience” that it is anthropology’s goal to provide.^L The internet, furthermore, offers new possibilities for the archiving and dissemination of visual materials, and their incorporation into interactive hypermedia presentations. The coming new generation of interactive web-based programmes currently being referred to by the shorthand of “Web 2.0” will make this even easier.^M In this article, I offer a brief report on my own experience of teaching courses in Visual Ethnography, in the hope that it may be of comparative interest to others teaching such courses, or may encourage more social science departments to consider the benefits of offering such courses.

Laying the groundwork

NUS Department of Sociology has been offering courses in Visual Ethnography since 2002. The original course was devised by myself in collaboration with my then colleague,

^K Some practitioners have not hesitated to cross the boundaries. John Marshall, renowned among anthropologists for his decades of film work and collaboration with the Ju’hoansi (formerly known as !Kung, or “Bushmen”) people of the Kalahari, also made a series of films with the Pittsburgh Police in the 1970s, and worked with Fred Wiseman on his social documentary, *Titicut Follies* (1967), which shockingly depicted the treatment of the criminally insane in the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Bridgewater, U SA.

^L The idea of “shareable experience” is used by Watson (1989:4) in a discussion of the value of autobiography and personal narratives; but it applies equally appropriately to film.

^M See the following short online video by anthropologist Michael Wesch of Kansas State University, which hit the #1 spot on YouTube in Feb 2007: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>

Aileen Toohey. When we started this initiative, we first (in conjunction with another colleague who specialises in media, Leong Wai Teng) organised a workshop on *Visual Ethnography: New Horizons in Social Research Using Digital Media in Southeast Asia*. This was held on 19-21 February 2001, and brought together ethnographic and documentary filmmakers from within and beyond the Southeast Asian region, local media practitioners from Singapore, and around 50 participants, for discussion and screenings of recent works by the speakers. The intention was to generate an exchange of ideas on the potentials of the new digital media technologies, and how these will transform documentary practices, especially in ethnographic filmmaking. At the same time, we wanted to draw on the expertise of those present who had extensive experience of teaching film and video to students. Participants included Dr Paul Henley, Director of the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, Manchester University; Judith MacDougall, from the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, Canberra; Mr. Kidlat Tahimik, an independent filmmaker from the Philippines and Artistic Director of Sunflower Cooperative, who makes films which are at once highly personal and deeply political, concerning issues arising from the long history of colonization in the Philippines^N; Mr. Alan Rosenthal, Professor of Communications at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1971-2000), and at that time a visiting film-maker with Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Film and Media Studies Programme, who has directed over fifty TV documentaries and docudramas; Mr Sitthipong Kalayane, an independent filmmaker from Thailand, and managing director of Images Asia, an alternative media organisation in Chiang Mai, which provides training to ethnic minorities and socially concerned non-government organizations on video production under dangerous or difficult conditions; and local documentary practitioners Jason Lai and Tony Chow, who run their own independent production companies in Singapore. The themes discussed included the documentation of social issues, problems of censorship, the challenges of teaching visual media, and the potentials of multimedia, especially for projects done in collaboration with local or indigenous communities. We were lucky to be able to invite Judith MacDougall to stay on for several days after the workshop to run a short course in camera use for interested staff in the Sociology Department. With remaining funds, we were later able to invite another well respected filmmaker, Patsy Asch, to visit the Department to show and talk about her work and interact with our first batch of Visual Ethnography students as they embarked on their own film projects, an engagement that they found very rewarding. These events were very productive in that they enabled us to embark on a steep learning curve and to gather a great deal of useful practical advice from those most experienced in the field. I compiled all of this information into handouts to guide the students and help them as far as possible to avoid some of the commonest errors in camera use.

From the technical point of view, what was equally important in enabling us to launch the course was the willingness of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences to purchase a sufficient number of Sony VX 2000 video cameras (a high quality semi-professional model), and computer editing decks (using Adobe Premiere software). This is in line with the University's long term goals to incorporate new technologies and their creative uses into our teaching. The Faculty has also offered us vital support through its Media Development Unit, whose staff assist in teaching the use of the cameras and editing software, and have given their time generously in helping students through the editing of their final project, for which they work in small groups to produce a ten-minute finished film. In order to upgrade my own skills, I used the opportunity of a sabbatical in 2004 to spend some time at ANU's Cross-Cultural Research Centre learning

^N Notable among these are *Perfumed Nightmare* (1978) and *Turumba* (1984).

how to use their editing software, and have since begun a video project in my own research in Indonesia.

What started as a single module for third year students (combining both a critical history of ethnographic film, and the hands-on practical experience of learning to use the cameras, perform a variety of simple exercises in small groups, and eventually make a ten-minute film) has now expanded into two courses: a purely critical course of film viewing and analysis for an intake of up to 100 students at the third year level, and a practical course for a smaller group of 15 to 30 students at the graduate level, where it can be accessed also by our fourth-year Honours students. The latter enables more time to be devoted to practical skills, while still involving a certain amount of film viewing and a more condensed approach to understanding how ethnographic film has developed as a distinctive genre. Students engage in simple exercises such as framing, filming a process (for instance making an omelette or a cup of tea, or going on a brief journey) in a concise selection of shots without editing; telling a brief anecdote to camera; and practising recording clean sound. These are designed to get them familiar with being on both sides of the camera, and encourage them to think about how one 'shows' a story in images rather than telling it. The final exercise of the module is to make a ten-minute film for which the brief is to create a portrait of a person in their social setting. This could be at work, in the home, doing a hobby, or any other aspect(s) of that person's life that can be presented in a sociologically interesting way. Students work together on this project in a small group (two to four people, depending on numbers and equipment). The tradition of the short film is a long and honourable one in the history of cinema, and it requires great discipline to make a good ten-minute film, so there is much to be learned from this exercise.

Since at the second-year level, we already have a course on Mass Media and Communication, students who have an interest in the visual can now trace that thread in their course selection from year to year if they choose; while we can now offer graduates preparing for fieldwork the chance to learn basic filmmaking skills which they might choose to use in their own research. As Singapore's economy expands to include an increasing number of small independent production houses, making documentaries and other films on commission for cable and local TV channels, a few of our graduates are already finding their way into employment in this area. It is to be hoped that we can expand our future courses further to provide a fuller training than can feasibly be offered in a single introductory module. There is potential, too, for developing greater synergy with other programmes in the Faculty such as Communications and New Media, and Theatre Studies. In the long term, more graduate students, here and in other universities, are going to want to incorporate video as part of their thesis, in complementarity with text. This is a challenge to the staff to upgrade their own visual literacy and come to grips with the question of how to assess such materials appropriately and fairly.

Learning to think in/through images

Feedback from students who have taken these courses has been overwhelmingly positive. As a teacher, this was the first time I have taught a course that involves the transmission of practical skills, and it has been stimulating to realise how different an enterprise this can be from the usual text-based courses. Since much of the work is done in small groups, I soon became aware of how much students were learning from the experience of working together. They have to share ideas, negotiate with each other over practical problems, and form a viable rapport with a consenting participant who agrees to be filmed. Group interaction is bound to become especially intense at the editing stage, when there will be fierce debate about the structure of the finished product, and

compromises will have to be reached over which sequences are to be left in or out of it. Everybody has their favourite sequence, which, however beguiling, may or may not ultimately contribute to the rhythm and pace of the story they are seeking to convey. I have also found that, by the end of the course, students are able to write about the ethical dimensions of research in a much deeper way than I might have expected, which tells me that they have absorbed and integrated the issues by taking them out of the text book into the real world and learning to apply the knowledge in their own experience. Although assessment of the practical course rests mostly on the actual film exercises, students still produce some individual written work. I have been led to reflect, however, on the relative value of the two. Once students leave the university, they may never write another essay, but the lessons of group co-operation will serve them well in whatever occupations they choose later.

The range of individual portraits produced has been impressive, and touches on many issues of wider sociological significance. The study of a Hainanese Opera singer shed light on historical issues: her father's formation of an Opera troupe had provided some degree of protection for the family during the Japanese Occupation, since such groups were required to entertain Japanese troops and were given letters of safe passage. In the portrait of a person suffering from diabetes, that individual spoke thoughtfully about how she had come to terms with a chronic illness; we see her giving educational talks to a local support group. A Sikh woman who had pursued an uncoventional career in motor racing was interviewed in her auto shop, explaining how she had kept her activities secret from her family until the day when her father saw her winning a race on television; she comments amusingly on what it was like to enter such a male-dominated field and succeed. A student of marine biology shares her passion for scuba diving around Singapore's islands in order to monitor environmental conditions affecting coral growth. A tattooist, when asked how he had learned his skills, explains how he began by practising on members of the family; we see a magnificent lion, tattooed across the father's shoulder. A local composer, seated at the piano, improvises ironic versions of well known tunes while explaining the problems he faced in pursuing his goals in a society at that time insistent on pragmatism rather than creativity. Students who filmed with a sign language interpreter found ways to prod the viewers into imagining a life without sound, by deliberately cutting the sound out of their introductory montage. Other subjects have included a Japanese Sushi chef, a transvestite cabaret dancer, a man who uses birdwatching as relief from the stresses of Singapore's dense and fast-paced urban environment, a convert to Mormonism, a fishmonger, and a carver of Chinese deity statues. The latter film was incorporated the following year into an exhibition on the Chinese diaspora at the Museum of Mankind in London.^o Perhaps because of an understandable tendency on the part of students to seek out someone who is a bit unusual, portraits have also been made of a variety of other individuals who in different, unexpected ways have chosen to swim against the tide of a generally conformist society, often by doing a job which may not pay well but offers greater personal autonomy, creative freedom, or the satisfaction of being socially useful. Discussion of their subjects' chosen trajectories in life enables the students to reflect more deeply on their own circumstances, and draw connections with wider sociological theorising of the human predicament in postmodern, late capitalist societies. Watching the subjects engaged in their particular chosen activities adds a fresh dimension to our understanding, whether these are ordinary or apparently "exotic" (in any case a highly relative term in Singapore's richly eclectic mix of cultures and occupations!). But it should be clear from the above

^o *And Man Created Gods*, by Geneviève Duggan, Anand Ramchand and Alexandros Stathopoulos, 2005.

list that there is no need to seek out supposedly ‘exotic’ subjects in order to make an interesting film.

Naturally, what one can teach to students in a single module is hardly going to make them professional filmmakers, but it is possible to transmit a sound knowledge at least of basic skills, as well as ways of thinking about how film works and what makes interesting content, so that those who find they like the medium can go on and make another video. One group from my first intake of students did just that, making a very competent and imaginative entry for a Singapore short film competition in 2003.^P Gauri Bharat, an architecture student who is a more recent graduate of the course, has since decided to use video in her Ph.D.. Her research investigates architecture and life in a *basti* or slum area on the fringes of Jamshedpur in eastern India. She has taken the technique in an imaginative new direction, by handing the camera to her informants and asking them to film what is significant to them about their lived environment, while providing their own running commentary. The results so far are very revealing of the inhabitants’ priorities and values, about subtly gendered domains and movement patterns, different individuals’ personal pathways through the neighbourhood, aspects of community organisation, and the problems faced by the inhabitants in securing and maintaining infrastructural features. With this technique, Ghauri has accumulated a diverse collection of filmic narratives representing different points of view on the community. A key feature of these narratives, she notes, is that rather than representing spaces in the form of abstract diagrams, as is customary in architectural research, they are composed of “sequences of interpersonal events” involving the informant and the people, settings and events that they encounter or seek out to become a part of their narrative – or which conversely, they may choose not to record. They thus provide a rich and nuanced source of data from which to learn what people really think and feel about their neighbourhood.

Sometimes, the engagement with the visual medium itself leads to unexpected discoveries or alterations of perspective: one student wrote to me that the film she had enjoyed watching the most in one of my courses was Robert Flaherty’s 1922 classic, *Nanook of the North* – because, as she explained, she had never seen a black and white film before, let alone a silent one. Another student revealed that he had returned repeatedly to the library to watch Jean Rouch’s *Jaguar* (1967) over and over again, fascinated by the unfamiliar sights and sounds of West Africa that it contains. (Few set texts can claim to elicit a response as enthusiastic as that one!) As he spoke to me, he commented on how watching films seriously had enhanced the pleasure of looking at the world in a more general way: “I see everything differently now – for instance, now I am seeing you sitting at your desk, and the way the rain is falling across the window pane behind you, and I see it differently, because of watching all those films.” I conclude, then, that an education in visual ethnography can change the way we see the world in more ways than one; and there has never been a more practical or a more exciting time to offer students this possibility.

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^P *Spread the Good News*, written and directed by Alex Tham, with Mindy Tan and Lee Pei Yee, 2003.

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e-bulletin

Fieldwork and Teaching Contemporary Sociology: Some Experiences from Uganda

Peter Rwagara Atekyereza
Makerere University Kampala
atekyereza@ss.mak.ac.ug

Dr. Peter R. Atekyereza is a Senior Lecturer and Heads the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Makerere University Kampala. He holds a PhD in Economic and Social Sciences from Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria (2001) and an MSc in Rural and Urban Planning from the University of Zimbabwe, Harare (1995) and a B.A. in Social Sciences from Makerere University (1991). His teaching and research areas are in the Sociology of Rural Development and African Family studies in the context of HIV/AIDS. His publications focus on the Family, HIV/AIDS and Household Economic Emancipation. His current research centres on the relationship between marital statuses and living the dynamics of risk to HIV infection. He also studies urban agriculture in relation to sustainable livelihoods in the Lake Victoria region. He is also the National Coordinator for RENEWAL Uganda (RENEWAL is the Regional Network on HIV/AIDS, Livelihoods and Food Security) a network that promoted the linkages between HIV/AIDS and food and nutrition security. It is facilitated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Abstract

As a discipline that focuses on the experiential lives of human beings, Sociology clearly posits itself as a distinct discipline that must inform and be informed by field realities. We are part of the world we study and we must never blind it or be blinded by it. The broader context of realities in our societies is changing or being transformed every other day particularly in order to keep pace or the place with(in) the globalising economy. Sociology is central to understanding and guiding the direction of this transformation because, ultimately and ideally, this transformation is planned and managed by as well as intended for (benefit of the) people. However, whereas the transformation is going on unfettered, the capacity to generate, internalise and impart the relevant sociological guidance is constrained by a number of factors among which is the inadequate or incapacity to balance theoretical (lecture-room) and practical (fieldwork or experiential) teaching and learning. It is from this perspective and teaching experiences at Makerere University that I argue that in order to effectively teach and impart meaningful sociological skills, the students need exposure to both theoretical knowledge and field experience of the relevance and/or application of this knowledge through fieldwork during the training.

Introduction

The focus of Sociology as a discipline is on the scientific study of the human society. As sociologists, we seek to understand all aspects of society ranging from concepts to practice and policy engagements i.e. from the level of small-scale social interactions to issues of large scale structural relations. Sociology interrogates how even things as

apparently personal as our bodily gestures and behaviour are influenced by social relationships. At the level of large-scale social activity/intercourse we, as sociologists, are interested in understanding the ways in which, for example, people's life opportunities for education, employment, income or access to civil rights and freedom of expression are structured by particular patterns of economic relationships and political power. The consequences of these relations form the foundation of sociological issues that we must understand and help others to understand in order to inform and guide their containment or resolution. Sociological import is meaningful in many different social activities: from community mobilisation to democracy, from journalism to personnel management, public administration to commerce; from folksongs to management of popular music industry, etc.

The starting point for Sociology in handling such problems is not primarily focusing on solutions but by asking questions generative of the information on why such problems exist in the first place. These questions relate to forms of accepted or acceptable behaviour and what or who influences these expectations; the basis and distribution of power within society. Sociology further helps us to question and understand why some groups in our society are accorded high status, while others are denied respect and opportunities and why the status quo is protected. What kind of religious ideals do we hold and why? What is the nature and forms of legislation and who is protected and punished by the laws? Sociology inquires into the patterns of production and consumption (e.g. what food do we eat and why?) and the ways in which changes in these patterns affect family life or the relationships between men and women, and between generations. In addition to understanding the broad organisation of social life, sociology can and has made significant contribution to what are commonly identified as social problems i.e. discrimination, poverty, disease, ignorance, unemployment, crime and violence (in all its forms), dictatorship, corruption, absence of rule of law, etc.

The sociological perspective helps us to explain the ways in which our lives are shaped and influenced by the structure and organisation of our day-to-day social relationships. From the time of Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber, (1864-1920), Karl Marx (1818 -1883) and others, it is demonstrated that these sociological scholars must anchor their sociological contributions on the issues or problems that affect their societies (Coser 1977). These classical sociologists focused on the socio-economic, political and ideological consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation particularly in relation to class formations and struggle for political power, among others. Therefore, their sociological explanations and prescriptions were also intended to solve the problems as they existed in the context in which they lived.

Similarly, the relevance of contemporary sociology lies in addressing the problems and issues that confront us and our societies today as a result of different forms of social changes taking place. Among others, these issues include health, sickness and health care delivery systems (especially the current epidemics and sicknesses like HIV and AIDS, Malaria, child immunisable diseases etc); religion and religious movements; social deviance, crime and terrorism; urbanisation planning and development paradigms and the sociological consequences thereof; rural development issues, problems and problem solving frameworks; social networking and livelihoods; global socio-economic changes and the African family formations and functioning; etc.

In democratic governance, for example, why do we continue to witness situations where legitimacy is no longer defined by socially accepted norms and rules but by individuals? Why do some individuals find it free and others criminal to contest for positions of political power? Why is it OK for some individuals to commit crimes and go unpunished while others are punished even before being tried or proved guilty? In terms

of global peace and security, what is terrorism? What is the source of terrorism? Who defines who is a terrorist, who is not and according to what criteria? How should these terrorists be punished? How can sociology facilitate the understanding and transition towards conciliation among conflicting parties? In terms of development and welfare, why are poor people increasing amidst very good economic growth rates over decades? Why is the necessary information scarce even when it is available? Why do people in Uganda wish they did not have good things or productive resources that others crave for (*like in the case of oil*)? Why do we continue to observe differential access to resources in spite of political promises of social equity at every other election? In terms of ethnicity and identity, what can explain the intra-ethnic re-classification? What can explain the emergence of intra-community differentiation and discrimination as well as annihilation? How can we explain the continued existence of nepotism and cronyism in the era of rational economic liberalisation, political pluralism and democratic governance? Why are we actively participating in the processes of globalisation in spite of their serious negative consequences on our economies and peoples (Holley 2000)?

Finding answers to such and other questions is incumbent on every sociologist and effectively doing so can open wide opportunities to a range of careers and professions for sociologists. However, in order to have a clear understanding of the social institutions and processes, it is equally very important to grasp the concepts, research methods and analytical skills used in sociology: the theoretical and practical sociological skills. In all these, we need to question how or the extent to which the perspective on understanding and explaining these issues have been influenced by the north or by the people that actually do experience these issues and problems. This explains why both theoretical and experiential sociological instructions are very critical in our contemporary times.

Teaching Contemporary Sociology at Makerere University

Makerere University was first established in 1922 as a Technical School. In 1937, the College started developing into an institution of higher education, offering post-school certificate courses. In 1949, it became a University College affiliated to the University of London. In 1963, it became a university College of Eastern Africa. In 1970, Makerere became an independent University of the Republic of Uganda, offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses leading to its own awards (Makerere University 2001). Today Makerere University has twenty two faculties / institutes / schools offering not only day but also evening and external study programmes to a student body of more than 30,000. It is also a very active centre for research. These faculties, institutes and schools offer undergraduate courses leading to Bachelor's degrees and postgraduate courses leading to various Diplomas, Masters and Doctor of Philosophy degrees and are run by more than 1,200 academic staff and about 4000 support staff. Though there are now four public universities and a number of privately owned universities, it is important to note that it is only Makerere University that has the longest tradition of teaching the sociology discipline in Uganda. The Department of Sociology is as old as Makerere University and its mission is focussed on development planning and problem solving at intellectual, policy and practical levels. Activities of the Department basically include teaching, research and publication plus outreach activities. Our undergraduates are over 2000 and there are 50 postgraduate students with only 20 staff out of the 29 established academic positions.

The conventional mode of teaching sociology is through lectures, seminar or tutorial discussions and from the recent past through e-learning (*e.g. through the Blackboard and teleconferencing*) by use of computer technology. Lectures provide a basic framework of imparting ideas to the students, which guide their further study. Associated to most lecture courses are tutorials where smaller groups of students meet with a tutor to discuss

issues arising from their reading and the lectures. Tutorials offer students the opportunity to clarify issues and the chance to develop further the skills of questioning, discussion and argument. Often a particular question is set in advance to make tutorial discussions more fruitful. In addition to attending lectures and tutorials, students are normally expected to read widely, to work independently and to complete a number of written assignments. All these modes of instruction have their strengths and shortcomings with the common among them being the use of already established information about the societies that are discussed or explained which might not have been directly experienced by the students. In addition, whereas the lectures are being conducted, tutorials and seminars for bigger classes have stopped because of lack of space and staff to handle these tutorials (*see Mamdani 2007*).

However, as noted earlier, sociology deals with human life that is constantly in transition (in form of processes) cushioned in the statics (institutional frameworks) that make it possible for people to live their lives. Each society, across time and space, manifests itself differently and Sociologists must keep themselves within the pace of effectively understanding these transient manifestations. This is where field experiences outside the lecture and computer rooms become very critical and *sine qua non* to meaningful interpretation and teaching of contemporary sociology especially in developing countries like Uganda.

There are different types of fieldwork which equip both the students and lecturers or supervisors with different sociological experiences and skills. These include field research and dissertation and/or report writing as well as publications, field attachment with organisations or districts and organised field visits for classes under instruction. Field work in general and research in particular will be addressed in terms of their relevance for the students and not lecturers because for the latter it is taken as a given. Lecturers must continuously engage in research whose results feed back into teaching in the form of experiences and publications.

According to the available records for the period between 2001 and 2006, the Department of Sociology has had the number of students doing the course in Fieldwork and Dissertation writing (SOC.3204) ranging between 8 and 16 (*see Table 1*). This course is an elective. It needs to be noted that other disciplines in the social sciences and natural sciences also do this type of fieldwork which enables the students to particularly put into practice the methods of (social) investigation that are theoretically taught in class. The experiences derived from this fieldwork and dissertation writing equip students with skills of social investigation generally but most specifically with skills to evaluate already established information through literature review, skills in data collection and analysis as well as report writing. These skills are critically important in any profession or occupation.

In the past, field attachments were usually done in specific courses and with different organisations. Sociology courses that used to emphasise field attachments or visits with organisations include Sociology of Organisations (SOC.2108/3108), Sociology of Work and Industry (SOC.2109/3109), Sociology of Environmental Planning and Management (SOC.3119) and Sociology of Human Resource Management (SOC.3220), among others. Today, Field attachments (with organisations or districts) have become invigorated as a result of the activities of the Innovations at Makerere Committee (I@Mak.com) project activities with funding from the World Bank and Rockefeller Foundation. The project funded various projects in a three-phase pattern (i.e. Feasibility, Pilot and Full Implementation) and some of these culminated into field attachments as the phase of either Pilot and/or Full Implementation. It aims at strengthening the decentralisation process by training staff of the districts to attain higher degrees as well as

attaching students while still in training to be introduced to the needs for decentralised development planning and implementation. The training needs of districts' or local organisations' staff are assessed in light of the decentralization and Makerere University supports this by orienting its curriculum to produce personnel that cope with the changing needs of society.

One of the projects is in the Faculty of Social Sciences and its program includes sociology and non-sociology students. There were similar attachments in the Faculties or Schools of Education, Human Medicine, Agriculture, Technology, Science, Forest and Nature Conservation, East African School of Library and Information Science and Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. In field attachment, students are expected to translate their theoretical knowledge into practical experiences, and to get a practical exposure to what they have only learnt in class. They are expected to get a feel of what it is like to work in especially the up-country and remote districts, where they are likely to seek for employment work after graduation.

The activities in which students normally participate during the attachment include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- (i) Attending seminars on Local Government Development Plans (LGDP).
- (ii) Visiting and making work plans with community groups (including those under Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs)).
- (iii) Sensitization in community health (especially under the Community Development Officers (CDOs)).
- (iv) Attending workshops and Seminars (especially on HIV/AIDS, nutrition and family planning as well as gender mainstreaming); and attending community fundraising functions.
- (v) Home care visits to AIDS patients (including counseling).
- (vi) Training volunteer health workers (especially under the National Red Cross).
- (vii) Attending village Local Council (LC) courts (particularly on domestic violence or issues).
- (viii) Inspecting school hygiene.
- (ix) Mentoring functional adult literacy (FAL) classes.
- (x) Meeting with farmers associations and visiting farmers particularly those in bee keeping, poultry and goat rearing.
- (xi) Caring for children welfare. This was mainly reported by students who were attached to Compassion International a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).

On the other hand, planned field visits for classes have not been the practice in Sociology though this has now been incorporated into the new proposed graduate degree programme of the Master of Arts (MA) in Rural Development. This field visit at the beginning of the course is intended to give students a first-hand experience of community problems arising from underdevelopment and development processes such as poverty, deprivation and inequity. It is believed that a meaningful response to these community problems, for example, through basic services like education, health, agriculture, water and sanitation, etc. will be generated from the internalised local context.

Experiences of Teaching Sociology through Fieldwork

The experiences of teaching sociology through fieldwork at Makerere University need to be understood within the historical context of both Uganda as a country and Makerere as a public university. Uganda got its political independence on 9th October 1962 from Britain. The absence of western education in pre-colonial Africa does not mean that education did not exist on the continent. Normally, each community evolves its own forms of education based on religious, social, political, economic and cultural values of that very community. Hence, education was part of living and people did not have to first go to a classroom in a formal school to be educated. The whole process of living was a learning process (Atekyereza, 2001). However, western formal education came with missionaries in the 19th century and was discriminative, socially and regionally, right from the start (Evans, 1994). The violent political history between the 1960s and 1980s, among other things, did allow for the correction of these historical mistakes. The education sector in general and University education in particular, suffered the immense effects of the implementation of the structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of reduced funding to universities (Lopes, 1994). Amidst this financial squeeze, the University introduced self-sponsored programmes, which apart from providing additional revenue to the running of the university also increased the number of students without a corresponding increase in the number of teaching staff. Graduate programmes are now all privately-sponsored while the government funds only 4,000 students per year in all the public universities and with a bias towards natural sciences with effect from the 2005/06 academic year. So these realities have partly affected the modes of teaching at the university in general and Sociology in particular.

There are immense positive results associated with fieldwork as part of the learning experience; however, such benefits do not come without challenges. Students who have done the course(s) in fieldwork and dissertation have appreciated the value of the practical experience that they acquire. On completion of the dissertation, one Sociology student commented:

I was always reading to pass the examinations without putting much effort into finding the meaning to what I studied. It was after going through the practical process of proposal writing, going to the field to conduct the interviews and discussions, analysing the data and writing the dissertation, that I realised and appreciated the value of having studied Social Research Methods (SOC.2101) and Basic Statistics (SOC.2203). A *Third Year Student of 2004*.

However, this valuable experience and knowledge does not come so cheap. Research funds for both teaching staff and students are very little compared to the demand. For the students, the University budget classifies this as Special Faculty Allowance (SFA) and varies with the government subvention allocated to the University each year. Unfortunately, when the economy is not functioning according to expectations or other government priorities emerge, it is usually the budget lines like research that suffer most. According to the allocation of the SFA received during the period between 2000 and 2006 by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Makerere University received an equal amount of money for field work though the number of students and cost of living have been increasing. The whole of Social Sciences Faculty received Ugx 25,000,000/= (equivalent to about US\$13,888.89) during the financial years of 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03 and 30,000,000/= (equivalent to about US\$16,666.67) from 2003/04 to date. The Department of Sociology received a portion of these funds as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Special Faculty Allowance for Sociology Students 2001-2006

Financial Year	No. of Students	Total Allocation	Allocation per Student	
			Ugx	US Dollars ^Q
2005/06	10	1,893,940/=	189,394/=	105.22
2004/05	15	8,922,420/=	594,828/=	330.46
2003/04	16	5,517,232/=	344,827/=	191.57
2002/03	10	2,586,200/=	258,620/=	143.68
2001/02	8	2,424,232/=	303,029/=	168.35

Source: Accounts Office, Faculty of Social Sciences (2006)

Unfortunately, in addition to funds being little, they are also received late. Normally, students receive the funds when they are about to finish writing or have already submitted their dissertations for examination. This has meant that only those students that can afford to get funds for the necessary activities, with or without external funding, do the course. It is even worse for the privately sponsored students because they have to bear all the costs involved and this has resulted in less privately sponsored students doing this important course. During the just completed academic year (2005/06), there was not a single privately sponsored student that did the course.

At the Graduate Level (MA Sociology), fieldwork and dissertation is part of the programme definition i.e. the Master of Arts in Sociology by Coursework and Dissertation. This implies that students must do fieldwork research (though use of existing data is also permissible) with their own funding. However, the experience so far indicates that completion of the first coursework year is very fine but students have problems completing their dissertations in time. Table 2 shows the completion rate since the start of the MA Sociology programme in 1997.

Table 2: Completion Status of MA Students in Sociology

Admission Cohort	No. Registered	No. Graduated	No. not graduated
1997	13	11	02
1998	08	06	02
1999	06	06	00
2001	14	09	05
2002	23	14	09
2003	15	04	11
Total	79	50	29

Source: Department of Sociology, Makerere University, February 2007

^Q Using the exchange rate of US\$1=1800Ugx

Table 2 demonstrates that the completion rate is 63.3% on average with 36.7% of the students still failing to complete the course in Fieldwork and Dissertation. University-wide, the students in the 2000^R cohort and before who have not graduated have been de-registered. None of the students admitted in 2004 onwards has finished and there are different reasons for this non-completion but the common one is lack of money to finance the research and lack of time to go for field data collection because of work commitments. Students have to work in order to raise their tuition and other fees. This greatly undermines the opportunity to effectively learn from the world of experience.

In terms of Internships or Field attachment, students who have participated appreciate the learning experiences acquired as a result of participating in the activities already mentioned above. As a result of these field attachments, especially at the districts, students have been able to appreciate and understand local development and administrative needs as well as translating their theoretical sociological knowledge into practice even before the student completes the degree programme. These experiences have further fed into the revision of the curricula to meet the districts' needs. Field visits are almost similar to the attachments except that the visits tend to be shorter, have a particular focus and form an important back up for seminar or tutorial discussions. According to the students' reports from field attachments, the students practically learnt the following:

- (i) Preparation of work plans and budgets
- (ii) Financial management
- (iii) Principles and dimensions of decentralization
- (iv) Understanding the role of a Community Development Officer
- (v) Community mobilization and sensitization
- (vi) Teamwork and HIV/AIDS counseling
- (vii) How Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Microfinance Institutions operate
- (viii) Communication skills (speak in public) and Community problem-solving
- (ix) Learning new languages
- (x) How to work with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs)
- (xi) Self-reliance, time management and how to work with minimum supervision
- (xii) Importance of functional adult literacy and how to work with the youth
- (xiii) Evaluation of local government activities

However, it was not very easy to achieve the above-mentioned benefits. Internships cost a lot of money making it impossible for resource-poor universities to conduct them. The logistical and resource constraints dictate that only a small number of the social science students be given this opportunity. Until this internship becomes a part of the students' curriculum and get funding from government, it will be difficult to have it available to all social science students. The only funding available now for this exercise is from I@mak.com which will definitely end with the end of the project. This raises very serious sustainability concerns.

According to Table 3, the cost of maintaining a student in the field for six weeks (including supervision) is Ugx 708,475 (equivalent to US \$393.60) while the tuition for one Semester of 17 weeks is Ugx 450,000 (equivalent to US \$250). This implies that the internship costs an extra US \$143.60 in spite of lasting only six weeks. However, it is also important to note that there was one student who sponsored him/herself to stay in the

^R There was no admission to the MA Sociology in 2000.

field. Though the number of interns increased from 16 in 2001 to 295 in 2006, this is still a very small proportion of 14.8 percent (i.e. 295 out of 2000 students).

Table 3: History of [I@Mak.Com](#) Field Attachments

Year	Number of Students	Number of Supervisors	Number of Districts	Duration of Fieldwork	Total Funding	
					Uganda Shs	US \$
2001 ^S	16	1	1	1 Week	17,000,000/=	9,444.44
2004	75	2	5	10 Weeks	52,000,000/=	28,888.89
2005	100	4	11	1 Month	56,976,000/=	31,653.33
2006	295	9	28	6 Weeks	209,000,000/=	116,111.11

Source: Office of the Field Attachment Coordinator, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2006

The other problems, which have been experienced and reported, are in a way what our students face on course completion but which they need to understand before they graduate. In a way, these are the opportunities for the students to learn *apriori* the working conditions and realities in local organizations or districts. These experiences further strengthen the need to promote fieldwork as part of the university learning process. Reported problems include:

- (i) Poor time management by local government officials mainly at sub counties.
- (ii) Transport in the field particularly in remote rural areas with low population density and unfriendly terrain and bad weather. In addition, there were resultant high costs of internal transport (especially with use of motorcycle taxis (locally known as *boda boda*)).
- (iii) Fear of volcanic eruption in Eastern Uganda near Mt Elgon (though helped them to experience what local people go through daily).
- (iv) Redundancy especially with attachment to Community Based Organisations.
- (v) Suspicion by local officials of the students (on employment) and misconceptions that students had a lot of money which sometimes make local officials inform the students to pay for services that should be covered by the host institution. Sometimes, there would be clashes with local supervisors.
- (vi) Lack of medical allowance or medical insurance. This was particularly critical for students that fell sick especially from Malaria necessitating *evacuation* (though local people are never evacuated).
- (vii) Language barrier. Many students found difficulties communicating with local people because they could not properly speak the local languages.
- (viii) Lack of communication network especially in places with no or poor phone network.
- (ix) Transfers or lack of local supervisors.
- (x) Lack of or expensive access to (especially potable) water e.g. paying 500/- (i.e. US\$0.28) per 20 litres of water.

^S This was the Pilot year.

(xi) Unequal accommodation arrangements. Some students were accommodated while others rented.

However, the overall evaluation of the internships/field attachments in local government (LG) institutions indicates that they need to move from being project-based and be integrated into the university academic programmes. This further implies that they should be carefully planned and budgeted for to ensure their sustainability. The reported problems and any other problems reinforce the need to entrench fieldwork in the teaching of Sociology and other social sciences because it is such experience that promotes better understanding of Sociology. Like Berger and Luckmann (1966) said, we are part of the world that we study and reality exists whether we are able to see it or not. Hence, social reality being both subjective and objective, we cannot avoid it in order to study it. As Roy Bhaskar explains in critique of empiricism and introducing a realist social science,

... society is not the unconditioned creation of the human agency (voluntarism), but neither does it exist independently of it (reification). An individual action neither completely determines (individualism) nor is it completely determined by (social determinism) by social forms (Bhaskar, 1982:286 *cited in* Manicas, 1987:273).

Social reality cannot completely be explained from the point of view of individual action because there is never an isolated individual. Like Manicas argued, if methodological individualism can be construed as holding that facts about society or human action are to be explained in terms of facts about individuals, and if facts about individuals/persons require predicates which presuppose a social context which cannot be reduced (translated) to predicate having no reference to social context, then, methodological individualism must itself be false (Manicas, 1987:271). The approval of the guidelines for field attachment by the Makerere University Senate (Makerere University 2006) is a right step in this right direction. However, more needs to be done to integrate the field attachments into the on-going curriculum review.

Lastly, field visits used to be done in the Department in the 1970s and early 1980s. During that period, the number of sociology students was small and this could enable the lecturers to organise such a visit either within Kampala or neighbouring districts or locations depending on the purpose of the visit. It is reported that in one of the visits conducted under the course in Social Anthropology, the students went to the Shrine of the believer in local traditional religion. After the visit, a big number of students dropped the course because of what they saw. Though such visits may be *apparently* frightening, they demonstrate the very social facts that students must encounter, conceptualise and understand or internalise instead of reading about them in textbooks if they are to be effective practicing sociologists.

Conclusion

The prime goal of teaching Sociology is to enable students to understand themselves, others and the larger society in order to change it. The relevance of appropriately teaching contemporary sociology lies in addressing the problems and issues that confront us today in our societies. This teaching is basically through lectures, seminars and tutorials as well as fieldwork in its various forms for acquiring various skills. It has been observed that the students taking field research and dissertation writing at undergraduate level in Uganda is decreasing particularly due to the high costs involved. This has serious implications for the internalisation of the tools for the generation and evaluation of knowledge that we critically need in explaining the world around us. Field visits are on the brink of disappearing while field attachments have come on board and are being

sustained outside the normal curriculum setting with project funding. This raises important sustainability concerns.

The experiences of using fieldwork in the teaching of Sociology and Social Sciences at Makerere University so far indicate its immense value in effective teaching. However, there are challenges of which the dominant one is finance or funding. A fair fieldwork needs a longer stay in the field but requires substantial amounts of money, which are not readily available. In addition, the timing of fieldwork may not be convenient to students and their hosts. Therefore, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of field attachments, it is important to pay specific attention to academic and field supervision, pre-planning, timing, placement and financial issues of the programme (Kamugisha 2006).

The overall experiences at Makerere University show that there is opportunity for promoting fieldwork in the teaching of Sociology given the fact that it is greatly appreciated by both the students and the districts or local organizations. Self-sponsorship of students, in particular, opens a window of opportunity for promoting internships if our universities could at least mobilise resources for transport and field supervision. The hosts of the interns, the university and local supervisors appreciate that the exercise is popular and beneficial to both the students and their local hosts, who have now appreciated the willingness of university students to live and work under the conditions obtained in these districts. This has helped to demystify the ivory tower perception of university students by the local people and also opens the opportunity for the future employment of the Interns. It must be emphasised that the onus on Sociologists is not only to understand but to change society. Hence killing the adequate teaching and studying of Society is not only killing sociology as a discipline but society, the subject of sociology.

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